

PLANET STORIES



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► *Powerful Novel of Alien Sorcery*

WITCH OF THE DEMON SEAS **A. A. Craig** 4

Guide a black galleon to the lost, fear-haunted Citadel of the Xanthi wizards—into the very jaws of Doom? Corun, condemned pirate of Conahar, laughed. Aye, he'd do it, and gladly. It would mean a reprieve from the headman's axe—a few more precious moments of life and love . . . though his lover be a witch!

► *Two Space-Adventure Novelets*

TIGER BY THE TAIL **Poul Anderson** 38

The haughty, horned aliens from the planet Scotha had very well organized intentions of conquering the Terran Empire—and Captain Dominic Flandry, Terra's ace saboteur, suddenly found himself in a strategic position to louse up the works. How? Well, Achilles had a heel . . . and what else could you call a Scothani?

MARTIAN NIGHTMARE **Bryce Walton** 80

Three tough, cynical fighting-men of Earth—Danton, Keith, Van Ness—rose from their tomb of forgetfulness . . . to find themselves space-wrecked on Mars, the last hope of mankind against the evil and immortal Oligarchs. It was weird, incredible, it was a horrible dream . . . but it was real. Or was it?

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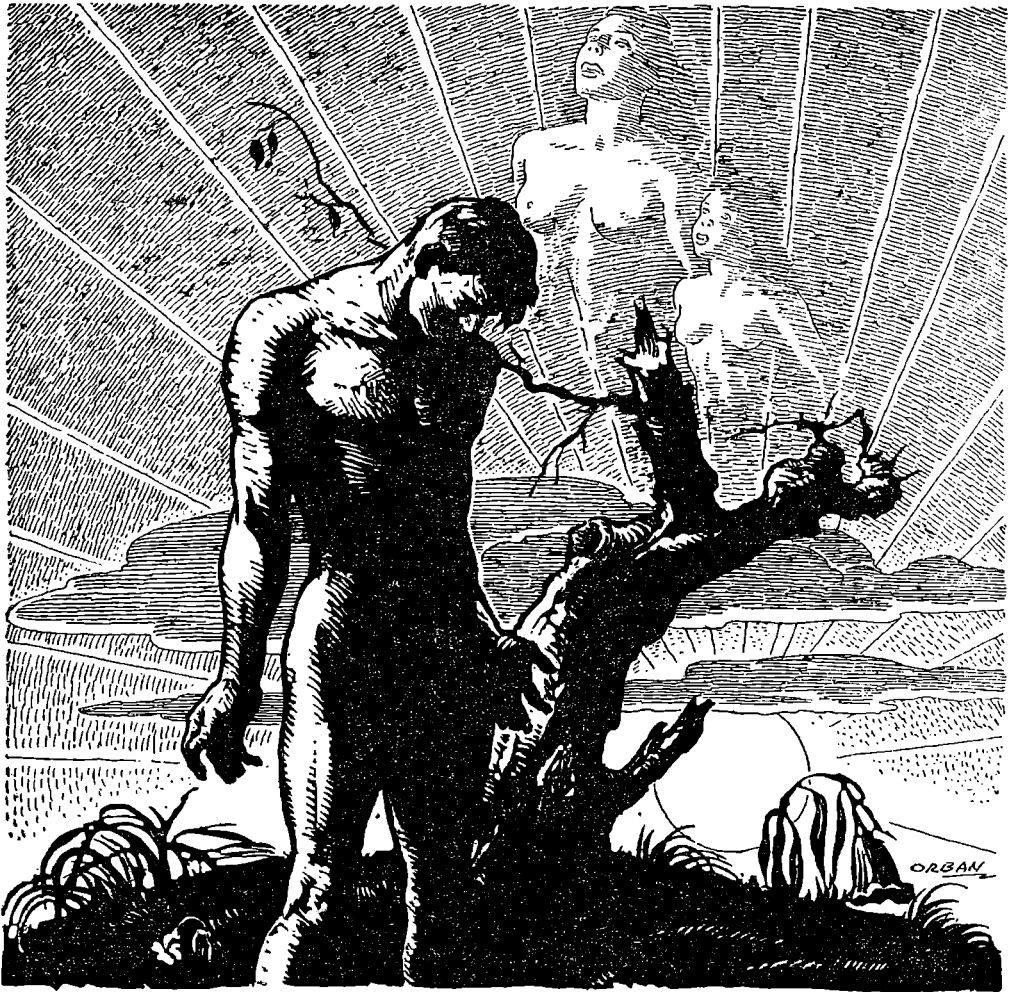
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Guest Expert

by Allen K. Lang

Earth had a problem . . . and the Martian visitor had a very deadly means of solving it . . .

"I'M ONLY HERE TO HELP you," said the man from Mars. "You've proved that," the Secretary admitted. "In the six weeks that you've been here, you've wiped out rabies, measles, and the common cold: but sir, this latest proposal of yours is blasphemous!"

The man from Mars waved an appendage in the direction of the Secretary's desk, atop which a newspaper was lying

open. "After reading what that paper has to say can you still doubt that what I propose is necessary?"

The young man in uniform crossed the room and picked up the newspaper. He read the headlines aloud, bitterly: "INDIAN FAMINE ARMY STORMS NEW DELHI"; "TASMAN REPUBLIC BIDS FOR PLACE IN SUN"; "PLAGUE DECIMATES LOWER NILE."

"You could end that plague." The Assistant's voice was accusing.

"I could, of course. The battles and the starvation would still be with you, though. Why do you persist in treating the symptoms instead of the sickness? I am an objective observer, far enough away from your problems to see them clearly, something which no human can ever hope to do. You Earthlings suffer war and famine and plague for one reason only: that there are four and eight-tenths billion of you living on an Earth which can feed only about two and a half billion of you well. Gentlemen, the population of your planet must be reduced by one-half if your race is to survive."

"Couldn't we send our surplus population to Mars, or to Venus?" the Assistant asked.

The man from Mars winced. "The sands of Mars can't support cactuses, much less fields of wheat and rice and corn. Venus is a solid sea of formaldehyde solution." He glanced around to each of the three men in the room. "To you, my scheme may seem heartless. But would it be more cruel to kill millions now than to allow billions to die in continual war in the next thousand years? Do you remember your last such war? The Ukrainian wheatlands scorched to desert by the thermonuclears? New England swept by epidemics of anthrax and tularemia? All China tortured by starvation and the hundred nagging sicknesses that follow hunger?"

"Yes, I remember." The Secretary rolled his pen between his fingers, staring at it. "How do you intend to—liquidate—the excess two billions?"

"I can't explain it to you; you lack the basic knowledge. It will be quick and painless though, I promise. Then Earth will see peace and hope; a new start!"

"I couldn't take all the responsibility for this decision upon myself," the Secretary said. He glanced hopefully toward the Assistant and the young man in uniform. Their eyes flinched away.

"You might take a vote," suggested the

man from Mars. He picked up the Secretary's scratch pad and ripped off three sheets of paper. "Just mark *Yes* or *No*. I will respect your decision: after all, I'm only here to help you."

The Secretary stared at the slip of paper lying on his desk. He glanced toward the other two humans for encouragement; but the Assistant was staring at the wall across the room, and the young man in uniform was silently contemplating the carpet at his feet.

Convulsively the Secretary scooped the paper toward him and scribbled his vote. Folding the paper, he looked demandingly toward his two companions. The young man in uniform looked up, then turned to hold his paper against the wall as he wrote his decision. The Assistant remained seated, holding the paper on top of a book while he lettered out his vote.

The man from Mars collected the three ballots, unfolded them, and read the three votes. "It's two to one," he announced. He crushed the papers into small, white pellets and tossed them out the open window. "What I have to do will be finished by noon tomorrow."

The man from Mars left the room, closing the door very softly behind him. The other three sat silent a moment and then got up and left without looking one another in the face.

THE NEXT DAY the Secretary and the Assistant sat in the office, staring at the clock above the door. At twelve-o-seven the door slammed open for the young man in uniform.

"Is it done?" the Assistant asked.

"Done? Of course, it's done!" The young man in uniform leaned against the door and shook with spasmodic laughter. "Now there's food enough and room enough for everyone. The man from Mars promised to solve our population problem. He did. At twelve noon, Eastern Daylight Saving Time, every woman and girl on Earth dropped dead."