

THRILLING WONDER STORIES



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TENTH ANNIVERSARY
NUMBER NEXT
ISSUE!

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**FEATURING
THE ULTIMATE
CATALYST**

A Novelet of Laboratory
Magic

By **JOHN TAINE**

•
ROBOT NEMESIS

An Interplanetary
Novelet

By

**DR. EDWARD ELMER
SMITH**

•
DAWN OF FLAME

A Complete Short Novel

By

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•
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BURROUGHS and
HULBERT
BURROUGHS**

JACK WILLIAMSON

—and others!

EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW

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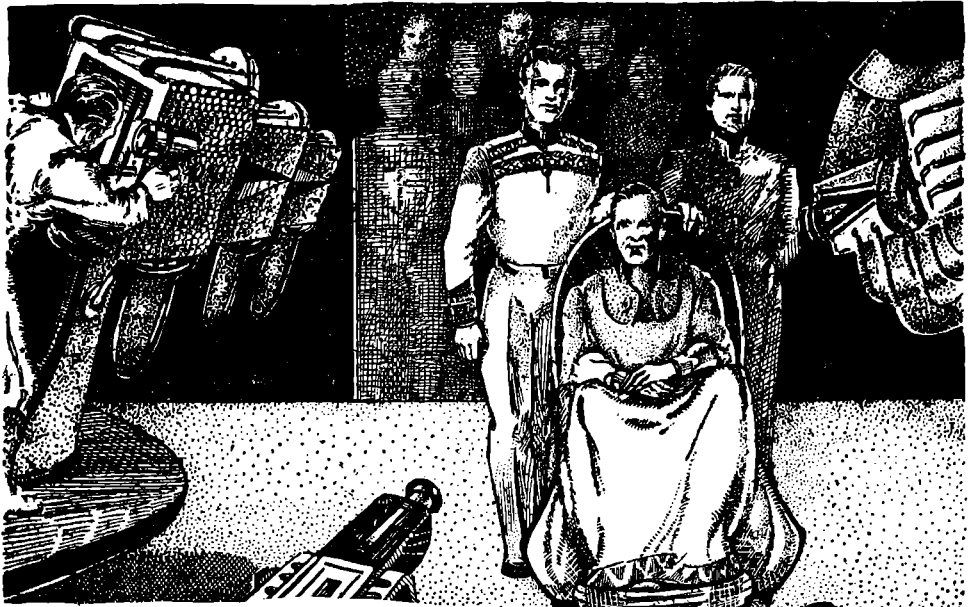
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● **ON THE COVER**

Artist Brown has depicted a scene from the novelet, MEN MUST DIE, by Ward Hawkins, which appears in this issue.

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Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk.



Hundreds of news-gatherers were there

ZEOH-X

A Capable Worker Revolts
Against His Passive Des-
tiny and Becomes a
National Hero!

BY
RAY CUMMINGS

*Author of "The Thing from Mars," "The Man
Who Saw Too Much," etc.*

IN a corner of the experimental laboratory of young Jon Manning, of the Manning Synthetic Food Products, big and wide-shouldered Zeoh-X stood silent and motionless. There was no task for him at the moment and he was watching young Jon, who sat before one of the big bubbling retorts where chemicals were mixing into a product that might prove a new food for the human body.

Young Jon—he was really no more than a boy—for weeks had been looking sick. Almost frightened. Zeoh had wondered why, but he had never



quite dared to ask. Questions were not natural to workers such as he. But tonight, in the purple glare of the heat-torches which were under the retorts with the purple-glowing fluorescent tubes beside them, young Jon's handsome face seemed more haggard than ever.

"What is the matter with you?" Zeoh asked suddenly. "Something is wrong, Master?"

He had not meant to ask the question. His guttural but resonant voice had an abnormal quaver to it. Young Jon looked up, startled.

"Eh? Oh, you, Zeoh? What did you say?"

"You look wrong," Zeoh responded. "What is the trouble?"

With a measured step he came forward and stood over young Jon. He was a big fellow, this Zeoh-X. He knew nothing except work. He had come here to serve young Jon Manning in the summer of 2240, a year ago.

Formerly he had been in the great factories of Windsor-Detroit. Old Georg Manning, Jon's father, had established those factories. He had trained Zeoh-X in them. And out of them—helped by Zeoh-X and a thousand workers like him, and ten thousand others less skilled—old Manning had made himself one of the richest men in the world.

"What is the trouble, Master?" Zeoh repeated.

It was the first time Zeoh had originated any questions beyond those necessary to the understanding of his simple tasks. It startled young Jon. For a moment he stared blankly. And then he gasped.

"Why—why, Zeoh—you're questioning me?"

Abruptly in the silence, the audiophone buzzed.

"Shall I respond to it, Mr. Jon?" Zeoh offered.

"No. I will."

Zeoh stood motionless in the corner across the room. But the split-wave, incoming aerial voice was as clear to his acute hearing as though the speaker were here in person. It was a call from the Honorable Robert Blakinson, world Secretary of the Interplanetary Federa-

tion, in Great-London.

Silently Zeoh stood watching and listening. Never before in his life had he made any real contact with his master's affairs. He had no way of understanding them; he never thought about them at all. He was a simple worker. But very queerly, somehow now he wanted to understand this thing which was transpiring before him. It was something that seemed hurting young Jon Manning.

Zeoh did not like that. Jon, even though he was only a boy of nineteen, was a good master. His orders were always clear and crisp; Zeoh had no trouble in handling them. And dimly within Zeoh now was a desire to help—a confusing desire to do something of his own free-will that would help young Jon. Something not just the routine work for which he had been trained.

ZEOH could not understand very clearly the audiophone conversation. But all of it was etched on his trained memory with complete clearness. There was, it seemed, a revolution impending on distant Mars. The Ferrok-Shahn Government of Mars, allied to the World-Federation, was complaining that the embargo-neutrality treaty was being violated by Earth. It seemed that Tormai—a giant, seven-foot Martian revolutionary leader—was secretly here on Earth, buying electronic munitions and they were being smuggled from Earth to Mars by a bandit Space-flyer.

"Where Tormai is getting the money to buy—here on Earth—these illicit armaments, God only knows," the Great-London Secretary was saying.

"Why do you call me?" young Jon Manning asked in perplexity.

Blakinson hesitated. "Shall I be blunt, Manning?"

"Yes, of course."

"The bandit flyer must be found and caught," the Secretary said grimly. "Our under-cover Shadow Squad of World Police cannot locate it. We believe it is here now, being loaded with munitions for this Interplanetary smuggling. Tormai must be caught. If this goes on—"

The World Secretary's voice went even more grim than before. "If we don't stop it, the Martian Government will formally declare that we've violated our treaty. We'll have the whole Interplanetary League after us. It could mean war—"

"Yes, sir. But still—why do you call me?" young Jon murmured.

Zeoh could hear a quivering timbre of terror now in his voice.

"Tormai, to do this, needs very considerable funds," the Secretary said. "Our Shadow Squad has reason to believe that he is getting the financial backing here on Earth. And your father, Georg J. Manning—"

"My father?" Jon quavered.

"Your father is a man of vast wealth. We know he is ill at present in the Pathological Institute of Dr. Argon, out there near you. That's true, isn't it?"

"Yes," Jon admitted. "My father is ill."

"And Dr. Argon is known to have lived on Mars, five years ago," went on the Secretary significantly. "His record is obscure, his reputation unsavory. Frankly, we believe him to be a sympathizer of Tormai's Martian trouble-making. And old Mr. Manning, if I must be wholly blunt, is known to be drawing very considerable funds from his personal Governmental deposits."

"Good God, I didn't know that!" Jon exclaimed. "Well, at any rate, that's his business, isn't it?"

"And perhaps it is our business also," the Secretary said. "What is your father doing with all that money? More than a million platinum-decimars in the past month. It's our concern, in view of these queer circumstances."

"My father is not a traitor," Jon flared.

A queer thrill almost akin to anger went through the listening Zeoh. This man in Great-London was trying to hurt his young master. It so queerly reacted on the slow brain of the worker, Zeoh, that his big fingers dangling at his sides were quivering and twitching.

"I tell you my father is not a traitor," Jon repeated. "He's ill—he's had almost a nervous breakdown." And then suddenly Jon's terror burst out.

"Oh, I can't pretend I'm not frightened, Mr. Blakinson," he added. "I—I'll take the dawn-flyer for Great-London tomorrow morning. I'll come and see you. There's something damnably queer about all this. I admit I'm worried about my father. But I've been helpless. I can't control him, you know. He'll tolerate no questions—no interference from me . . . Yes, yes, of course I'm hiding nothing from you. Father's been acting horribly strangely for a month. I admit that. But he's no traitor—"

WHEN the connection broke, for a long time young Jon Manning sat staring, his handsome boyish face white and terrified, his trembling hand rumpling his wavy black hair. He was just a boy, in desperate, mysterious trouble.

Over in the laboratory corner the big slow-thinking Zeoh still stood motionless. He could feel himself trembling inside. It was all so queer, so confusing. But he was quite sure now that Jon, and old Mr. Manning, were in desperate trouble.

It was frightening. And suddenly Zeoh wanted to do something about it. Within him was the impulse for action. Slowly he crossed the laboratory room and again stood over Jon.

"Tell me," he said. "Master, please tell me. What is the trouble? I do not understand."

There was no way by which Zeoh could understand such intricate affairs. Nor could he understand the startled look that Jon gave him.

"You want to understand, Zeoh? Why—Good Lord—"

"You told me when I came here to serve you, that you would explain everything I needed to know," Zeoh responded. "You are training me to my work. I want to serve you well."

"Why, Good Lord, you do serve me well, Zeoh. But there is nothing for you to do now. Go back to the corner and wait. I'll give you some orders presently."

But Zeoh only stood motionless. Inside him was a horrible confusion. Everything in him impelled him to respond to that order, "Go into the cor-

ner and wait." But now there was something else inside him, impelling him not to obey. The clash of impulses was horribly confusing. He wanted to think, because he knew that now there was something he wanted to do, of his own free-will—yet he had never been guilty of insubordination before.

"I want to learn everything," he said slowly. And the queer thought flashed to his brain that he had never wanted anything before outside of his work. "You're going away, Master?"

"Going to Great-London at dawn," Jon said. "But only for a day."

"Yes," Zeoh responded. "And your father, my old Master, is in trouble?"

"He's in horrible trouble," young Jon burst out. "He's in that damnable Pathological Sanatorium." Then suddenly Jon looked up, and his haggard boy-face tried to smile. "My God, Zeoh," he muttered. "It's weird that I should be telling you this."

"Please tell me," Zeoh said.

"I can't get father out of there," Jon exclaimed. "I saw him today. He—he's so changed! But he's master of himself, as always. He was angry with me. That's not like him, Zeoh."

"No, that is not like the old Master," Zeoh agreed.

"He ordered me out of the place—told me not to come again. And that damned sardonic Dr. Argon just stood and leered at me. And father treated me like a little boy."

"You want to get the old Master out of that place," Zeoh said slowly. "You are telling me that you want to get him out of that place."

"Yes. But I can't. And now they think father is doing something terribly wrong. My God, Zeoh, maybe he is—I don't know. But if he is, that Dr. Argon is making him do it. But how? I saw father, and talked with him. He's acting of his own free-will."

THEN the boyish Jon Manning laughed a little wildly with his terror. Zeoh's big, wide-shouldered body was trembling with the confusion of it, but he stood his ground. And suddenly his big hand went out and touched Jon's shoulder.

"I want to help," he said.

"You?" Young Jon stared. "You—what?"

"I want to help, whatever is the trouble, I want to work with it."

For another second Jon blankly stared.

"You couldn't help in this, Zeoh," he said finally. And then suddenly he studied his servant intently. "I'll talk with you when I return, Zeoh. Go to your place now and wait for your next orders."

"Yes, Master," Zeoh said. Obediently he went back across the room. And presently young Jon jumped from his chair.

"I'm going over to the house to pack my clothes," he said. "Tomorrow, Zeoh, you will take your orders from my assistant. I will be back the next day. You will have no trouble, I'm sure."

"Thank you," Zeoh responded.

The laboratory room was very silent when he was left alone. If only he could help! His whole body was quivering with the desire to do something. In the silence there was just the sizzle of the heat-torches and the slow bubbling of the viscous fluids in the big retorts.

Zeoh knew that young Jon in his terror had forgotten his work here with these retorts. The realization confused Zeoh. Should he turn off the heat torches? He stood for a moment; and then he moved quietly forward, bent and turned them off. The fluorescent tubes went dark. The free-will action gave Zeoh enormous confidence. It was not hard to do things beyond one's orders.

For a moment, in the dim laboratory, he stood at the window peering out at the black night. He knew where the Aaron Pathological Institute was located. It was not more than a mile from here, up in the forest-clad hills. He had been there with old Mr. Manning on an errand a year ago.

Then Zeoh suddenly from head to foot was shaking with excitement. He knew at last what he was going to do.

There was no one to see Zeoh as very methodically he went out the back door of the laboratory, walked across the yard, followed the path and plunged

into the woods. He was frightened at first. It was so different from all the routine tasks to be doing things at last of his own free-will.

In the woods, he ran. There was no need here for silence, and when the path twisted, he shortened the distance with lumbering, crashing tread through the underbrush.

Young Jon wanted his father home. The old Master was sick. He would not want to come home, but he must. Dr. Argon was an enemy. These simple thoughts were easy to understand. And it was easy to act, with thoughts like that to direct one. Zeoh felt his quivering terror leaving him and a queer reaction, like triumph in a task well done, was coming to take its place.

But this task wasn't done yet; and as the dark outlines of the metal structure which was the Argon Pathological Institute loomed ahead of him, a caution came to the lumbering servant. He slackened his pace; and then at the edge of the woods, like a grim, dark statue he stood beside a rock, peering.

There were two buildings here in this cauldron-like open space surrounded by the woods. One was a long low, rambling metal structure which housed the laboratories of Dr. Argon—a weird, mysterious place where surgical operations were performed upon defective people. But for a month now it had been closed. It was wholly dark, tonight at midnight, silent and seemingly deserted.

The other building was nearby; a small, cubicle affair which was Dr. Argon's home. A low metal passageway like a snake along the ground connected it with the laboratories.

FROM a metal pouch at his waist the prowling Zeoh drew a micro-phonous listener. He clamped it at the side of his head as he slowly padded forward toward the laboratories. There was no sound coming from within. Not even the sound of breathing, which the magnifier would have made apparent. The place was deserted.

He had stalked past the laboratory corner when, at one of the lower windows of the little house, he saw a dim light shining. And now his electrically

magnified hearing picked up voices.

"And what do you want me to do with him now that we're finished? He's himself tonight. Shall I treat him again?"

That was Dr. Argon's voice. Zeoh had heard it a year ago; his memory yielded recognition of its heavy timbre.

The other voice now sounded. It was a jargon of words that only clashed and jangled upon Zeoh's brain, and meant nothing. No worker like Zeoh was taught foreign languages.

"All right, kill him," Dr. Argon was saying callously. "I can prove sudden depressive insanity and that he committed suicide. You give me my share of the decimars, and I'm out of it."

Then the two voices were quarreling, perhaps about the money. Zeoh was close outside the window now. Its lower glassite pane was shrouded, but the upper one was partially lowered for air. Zeoh fitted a curve-ray lens over his eyes. As he turned on the current, the pallid violet beams sprang in an arc that curved up and through the window slit. The room's interior was revealed.

He saw the squat, heavy-set Dr. Argon. With the surgeon was a seven-foot giant of a manlike creature with a huge body upon bent spindly legs, and a bulbous head. It was Tormai, the Martian revolutionary leader.

The Martian stood with his silver, metal-fabric cloak wrapped around him and glared down at Dr. Argon. They were both jabbering now in the jargon of Martian language. Then the big Tormai turned and angrily stalked from the room.

Zeoh snapped off his curve-ray. It was becoming increasingly easy to think and act of his own free-will. He went to the little metal house-door farther along the wall. His tiny electro-heat torch was hanging at his metal belt. It hissed faintly as he turned it on, and under its sizzling heat the door-lock melted away like butter. The door yielded inward to the push of his huge shoulder.

He found himself in a dim, low-vaulted hallway. Down its length the figure of Tormai was vanishing in the direction of the laboratories. Swiftly Zeoh started after him.

Then from a dark door-oval came Argon's calling voice:

"All right—kill old Manning now. That suits me. My employees are coming back to work tomorrow. I can't keep up this isolation without people getting suspicious."

So Tormai and Argon were alone here, with Georg Manning, their prisoner. The old master was ill and must come home. Jon Manning had said so. That was enough for Zeoh.

Tormai vanished past an angle of the corridor just as the treacherous Dr. Argon came to the nearby door. In the dim blue tubelight he saw the advancing Zeoh. For a second Argon stared, his face blank with astonishment and then terror.

"Why—Good God!" he exclaimed. "What do you want? How did you get in, you damned—stop! Get back, I say!"

But Zeoh was not taking orders from him. He was no longer a simple servant that obeyed every order of any member of the ruling class. He was a worker in revolt to rescue an old master in danger. He continued to advance.

Argon reached in panic for a weapon at his belt. But with a pounce Zeoh seized him, snatched him up, held him like a child at arm's length. Argon screamed horribly as he struggled. But Zeoh hugged him, pressing him against his chest, until the screams died in a choked gurgle of blood. It mingled with the gruesome cracking of Argon's bones, and the blood of the villainous doctor spurted out in a horrible welter.

AT the turn of the corridor the huge Tormai had reappeared to gape in horror. Then his hand came up with an electric weapon. Zeoh saw the blue sizzling flash of the heat-volt. And then another came.

He felt the heat as he dropped the body of the dead doctor, and his huge left arm became useless. He could no longer control that member.

In that second Zeoh whirled and charged at the Martian. For a moment, there at the end of the hall, the big Martian stood his ground. Zeoh's arm hung limp as he ran forward.

"Back! Get back I say!" Tormai screamed in English. But within Zeoh there was only triumph at a job being well done. Tormai fired another bolt. It missed. It evidently was his last; for as the oncoming Zeoh neared him, he turned and fled.

But it was useless. He was trying to open the door in the narrow, snake-like passage to the laboratories when Zeoh caught him, and snatched him up with one hand. Like Argon, the big Martian's screams were horrible. Then Zeoh flung him down, stamping upon the Martian's head with his foot, mashing it into a gory, ghastly pulp of bones and blood and brains.

"Master! Old Master, where are you?" Zeoh called out as he opened the door and made his way toward the laboratories.

In the dark silence of the first laboratory; Zeoh at last heard the answering moan. And there was the old Master sitting in a corner with a chain upon his ankle like a dog tethered to the floor. He was haggard, trembling. He seemed dazed. But as he staggered to his feet with the chain clanking, he recognized Zeoh.

"You?" he gasped. "You, Zeoh?" He stared. "Where is Jon? How could you—"

Zeoh stooped to the floor and applied his enormous strength. His fingers swiftly severed the chain.

"I am acting of free-will, Master," Zeoh said proudly. "Argon and Tormai are your enemies. You are sick. You must come home."

Gently he gathered the old master up, and carefully holding him in the crook of his arm, he padded away.

* * * * *

The yard of the Manning Synthetic Food Products Company was crowded that next morning; a hundred newscasters and picture-makers rubbed shoulders with a group of Government officials and members of the World Police Shadow Squad. Georg Manning sat in a wheel-chair which had been rolled into the sunlight before the laboratory door. He was pale, nerve-shattered, but smiling, with the smiling young Jon beside him.

"They held my father under the in-

fluence of curarine," Jon explained. "We found Dr. Argon's notes on the subject. Quite evidently he has been experimenting with it for some time. It puts the body upon a lower plane of mental control—creates a dual personality with the baser nature controllable so that the drugged individual will do what he is told and still think that he is acting of his own volition."

"We've captured the bandit space-flyer," the World Police Commissioner announced to the newscasters. "It was loaded with contraband for Mars, and would have been gone in another few hours. Fortunately, Mr. Manning knew its location and with that damnable personality drug worn off last night, he was able to tell us."

Then suddenly a reporter was asking for Zeoh.

"He's the real hero," somebody called. "We want to see Zeoh."

"All right, he's here," young Jon said smilingly. He raised his voice. "Come outside, Zeoh."

IN the big laboratory door the ten-foot Zeoh appeared. Obediently he came into the laboratory yard with all the eyes of the assembled men staring at him in amazement and not a little trepidation.

"Yes, young Master," Zeoh said. "What do you wish?" He said it gently; inside he was vibrating with the triumph of a task well done.

Near him, a young reporter gasped.

"Why, it—he has a perfectly natural voice, Mr. Manning. He talks with expression—"

"The best product that ever came from my Windsor-Detroit plant," old Manning said proudly. "Ten years of service and now he has progressed suddenly into free-will action. I'm very proud of Zeoh."

"Thank you, Master," Zeoh said. No one was near him; no one had given him a verbal order. It was a free-will response.

"Why—my God, it thinks for itself,"

exclaimed the startled commissioner.

"Within the controlled limits of what I built into him," old Manning said, "he thinks now of his own free-will. Show them, Zeoh. Do anything you like."

IN the silence, as everyone stared with awe, Zeoh went back and forth in the yard with his lumbering, measured step, executing the old familiar routine of his training days. The sunlight gleamed on his ten-foot length of alunite body, his square metal shoulders, his square and impassive metal face. He could show no emotion save that his twin violet eye-beams were glowing with pride. His body-plates, newly polished for this morning, glistened resplendent. His great jointed legs worked smoothly. His jointed right arm went out with the huge mailed hand extended and the pincer-finger working.

But his left arm hung limp, inactive. The metal of the shoulder there was pitted, fused and scarred where Tor-mai's heat-bolt had struck. No matter. That would be fixed very easily when the expert arrived today from the Windsor-Detroit factories to make the repairs.

"Thank you very much, Zeoh," young Jon said, when the demonstration was finished. "Go back to your corner in the laboratory now and wait. I will have an order for you presently."

"Yes, Master," Zeoh responded. He clanked to the big laboratory doorway, stooped, passed through it and vanished inside.

And out in the sunlit yard, old Georg Manning, whose genius had created and built this Robot, was saying softly:

"Zeoh has had ten years of close association with humans. And you know, gentlemen, I'm wondering just how much of almost human feeling, and human reason, his ganglions of nerve-wires and his electronic brain cells are capable of generating."