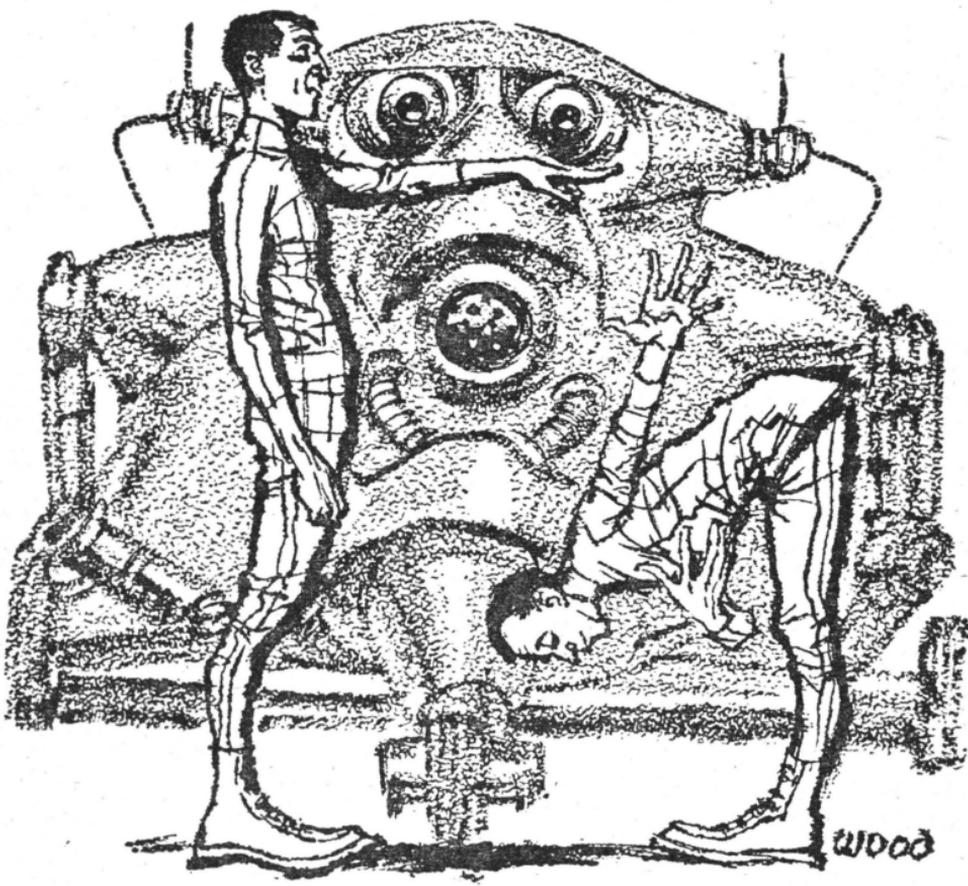


*If Joe Mulloy was perfect—and he was—
then beyond his perfection there only could be . . .*

SUPERJOEMULLOY

By SCOTT F. GRENVILLE

Illustrated by WOOD



JOE MULLOY lounged in the plushest chair in his luxurious office. All around him, on the walls, on the ceiling, even in strategic spots all over the

floor, there were mirrors. Joe sneered at the place where the mirrors were most profuse; twenty or thirty perfectly identical Joes sneered back at him.

He admired his sneer from every angle, shaping and changing the contemptuous look on his face with his hands, stroking it, much as other young men in a far earlier age had stroked and twisted their fine mustachios.

As usual, Joe Mulloy was engrossed in his two favorite hobbies: narcissism and indolence.

Joe's friends, of which there were very few, could have given you a fairly accurate resume of his character in five words, his sneer and his indolence.

In the first respect they would have been right. Joseph Mulloy had been born with a sneer on his face. His whole early life had been centered around that sneer. It had enraged his father, distressed his mother, driven his teachers to tears, his playmates to tantrums. He stopped doing homework at the age of eight, but the teachers passed him on anyway to avoid complete mental breakdown.

Gradually, Joe Mulloy began to get his way in everything by virtue of his sneer. It was not merely openly supercilious; that was the beauty of it. It was so subtle, so faint, and yet such an open avowal of contempt for the entire human race, that try as the people he tormented would, to find something in his sneer to charge him with, they never found anything.

In a very few years, registration day at Joe's elementary school became a game of Russian Roulette, having as the loaded chamber the question: "Who's going to get little Joey Mulloy in his class this year?" Finally, when Joe Mulloy was fifteen years old, the local Board of Education wisely decided to end Joe's formal education, rather than make screaming meemies an occupational disease at the local high school.

Joe's father welcomed the expelling as an excuse to beat him to a pulp and kick him out of the house. It was not until three days later that the memory of Joe's sneer, enduring through all the punishment he had received, made the father blow his brains out with the most accurate German Luger he could buy at the pawn shop on short notice.

But Joe's friends would have been wrong in the second instance, for Joseph Mulloy was not chronically indolent. In his own profession, Joe Mulloy was the most industrious man imaginable. For Joe Mulloy was a robot builder.

DISINHERITED by his father, he had made a beeline for the nearest positronics laboratory. The personnel manager had flatly refused him the job when he had told her he had absolutely no qualifications, but she was so disconcerted by his persistent sneer

that she had to give him the job just to get him out of her sight.

Once in the laboratory, he had gone right to work learning everything there was to know about robots, scorning all help from the other technicians. Since he held other scientists, past or present, in an ineffable contempt, he had to learn everything by experience instead of studying what his merely human predecessors had done. He was so empirical that he learned all about alternating current by deliberately sticking a wet finger in a light socket again and again.

He made mistakes at first, of course. In fact, he ruined several thousand dollars' worth of laboratory equipment during his apprenticeship. But his amazing sneer conquered all, and he was soon recognized as the most brilliant—and the most conceited—man in the field of positronics.

Now Joe Mulloy was lounging in a plush office chair, cultivating to near perfection his already mature sneer, and suddenly feeling maddeningly thirsty.

"Robot!" he said.

A startlingly human-looking robot seemed to materialize instantaneously from nowhere.

"How might thy humble servant serve thee, O magnificent Master?" it inquired, bowing so low that its partially metallic nose scratched the rich mahogany floor.

"What took you so long, you damned fool?" asked Joe.

"I apologize, Gracious Master. I am incompetent and worthless."

"Get me a drink, you bucket of bolts," said Joe.

"I am grateful for a chance to serve thee, Benevolent Master," replied the robot in its monotonous Uncle Tom patter, and made another floor-scratching bow. Then it groveled out of the room.

"That robot is getting too slavish," said Joe to himself, after the robot had left. "All my robots seem to be that way. They do exactly what I tell them to, and degrade themselves sickeningly before me. All the people I've ever known seem to be that way, too. I wish I could find at least one mind equal to mine to clash with. Then I could have a real fight for once. None of this bowing and scraping."

Just then the robot entered with a Manhattan, made its usual floor-gouging bow, and scraped its metal feet to get Joe's attention. Joe turned to glare at the mechanical minion.

"Robot!"

"Yes, Omnipotent Mas—" the robot began, but Joe cut it off.

"Get over to the laboratory and blow yourself up! And find an empty corner, where you won't do too much damage."

"Master, I am happy for the chance to give my life—"

"Never mind that, you glori-

fied Erector set! Do as I say!"
"Yes, Master." The robot hazarded a slight bow, but forgot to crawl out of the room on its hands and knees in its eagerness to follow its master's orders.

JOE MULLOY leaped to his feet. In the moment of his excitement, he forgot that melodrama is a human weakness, and he became melodramatic himself. Even his incorruptible sneer faded slightly as his excitement grew.

"I must find someone with a mind equal or superior to mine," he told himself. "Now who has a mind equal to mine? Obviously no one but me. Therefore I must find someone with a mind *superior* to mine. Now who is superior to me?" For the first time in his life, Joe Mulloy was confronted by what seemed an unanswerable question.

Joe's train of thought was interrupted by a deafening explosion from the laboratory, as his latest robot jubilantly committed suicide. The building shook violently for a few seconds, then subsided.

To his great surprise, he was able to answer his question.

"Of course! Since the only thing equal to me is me, the only thing superior to me would be a super-me, a super-ego! I'll build a super-robot, with all my magnificent qualities, only magnified a thousand

times! I'll build a Super Joe Mulloy!"

He ran the letters together to make it one word:
Superjoemulloy.

He dashed up to his laboratory, cleaned up the mess his overeager robot had made in killing itself, and went feverishly to work on his new project, learning the necessary techniques by experience, of course, and applying them to his super-robot. He made some mistakes at first, of course. But in three weeks and six days, Superjoemulloy was ready for its debut in robot society.

Not one to miss a chance to impress mere humans with his genius, Joe invited the world's greatest positronics experts to the unveiling of Superjoemulloy. There was a tense air of excitement as Joe pulled the lever that removed the big black curtain in front of the robot and started the activation machine.

When they saw Superjoemulloy, the experts gasped with envy. It was impossible to tell the super-robot from a human. Its limbs, torso, and head were so well proportioned, and done in such fine detail, that anyone in the room not in the know would have sworn that it was a human being. There were even fingerprints delicately cut into the super-robot's artificial hands. And Superjoemulloy looked exactly like Joe Mulloy, except for the sneer. It was twenty times bet-

ter even than Joe's own. It was a super-sneer.

But although the activation machine was working its hardest, nothing happened. The super-robot refused to move one solitary mechanical muscle. Joe's guests began to file out, once the novelty of the robot had passed. Joe left the room in disgust and went downstairs for a drink.

WHEN he returned to the laboratory, Superjoemulloy was on its feet, examining the laboratory equipment with obvious disgust. In the preceding few minutes, the super-robot's super-sneer had grown more perfect, and the robot was fast becoming the very personification of contempt.

"Why didn't you move around when my friends were here, you heap of junk?" Joe asked the super-robot.

Superjoemulloy turned to him. "I didn't want to display my perfection before mere humans, you distorted blob of protoplasm," it said.

Joe Mulloy was becoming angry, but he tried not to show it. He downed his drink.

"Get me another," he told the robot, holding out his glass.

"The hell with you," said Superjoemulloy. "What do you think you are, God or something? Just because you slapped me together with your clumsy butterfingers doesn't give you the right to order me around like some common serv-

ant. Now that you've created me, I could do a better job of robot-building myself. Now get the hell out of here."

Joe Mulloy turned on his heel and stomped out of the room. No robot was going to talk to him like that! No, sir!

The super-robot quietly followed Joe to the door and gave him a kick that sent him sprawling down the stairs. At the bottom of the staircase, Joe whacked his face against the solid oak of the banister. He turned groggily to look at the blurred image of the robot standing defiantly at the top of the steps, with its hands on its hips. For a brief second the sneer faded from Superjoemulloy's face, and was replaced by an evil sadistic leer.

Joe Mulloy recalled the last line of Father William: "Now be off, or I'll kick you down stairs." But the super-robot was far worse than Father William. A conceited, contemptuous monster, it was totally unlike Joe's warm, humble, self-effacing self! The sneering monster must be destroyed!

Joe cunningly enticed the robot to leave the laboratory for Joe's office, where it could admire its sneer in all the mirrors. Sneeringly Joe wondered why anyone could admire a sneer so much. Without thinking, he used his hand to smooth out the wrinkles in his now slightly worn sneer. Then he crept upstairs to his laboratory

to barricade himself in there to think of a way to destroy Superjoemulloy.

At last he hit on the answer. A hypnosis machine.

"The robot is mechanical, so I'll have to hypnotize him by mechanical means," Joe reasoned to himself.

He worked day and night, learning the necessary techniques as he went along. He made some mistakes at first, of course. But in four days the mechanical hypnosis machine was complete.

Joe found the super-robot in the mirror-lined office, where it had been admiring and improving its sneer for the last four days. The sneer was magnificent. But it still lay just one iota short of absolute perfection. Try as the robot would, perfection in a sneer still lay without its grasp.

"Genius!" shouted Joe, to get the robot to turn its head. He turned the dial on the mechanical hypnosis instrument up to full power. "You are now in my power!"

But now Superjoemulloy's sneer was completely perfect. With a look of sublime contempt on its plastic face, it took the hypnosis machine, turned it around, and aimed it right back at Joe Mulloy.

JOE MULLOY bowed so low that he skinned his nose on the rich mahogany floor. "Yes, Master?" he said.

"Bring me a drink, you blot of living tissue!" said Superjoemulloy.

Joe Mulloy made another nose-skinning bow and groveled out of the room.

"This human is getting too slavelike," said Superjoemulloy to himself. "I suppose I could rebuild him, though."

Joe returned almost instantly with a Manhattan, made his usual nose-damaging bow, and scraped his leather shoes to get Superjoemulloy's attention.

The super-robot turned and glared at him. "Human!"

"Yes, Master?"

"Get up on that slab in the corner."

Joe Mulloy obeyed.

With all the skill of an experienced human-builder, Superjoemulloy began to take Joe's body apart. Joe screamed, but the super-robot ordered him—by hypnotic command—to shut up, and Joe obeyed.

Superjoemulloy began to put together a Supersuperjoemulloy out of what had once been Joe Mulloy.

He made some mistakes at first, of course.

END

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