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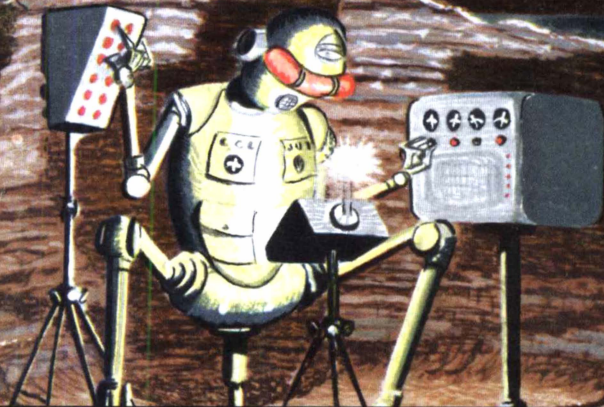
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STORIES



## LITTLE TIN SOLDIER

By Bill Peters



**GREAT! NEW!**  
**SCIENCE FICTION**

By

MURRAY LEINSTER • PHILLIP DICK  
RICHARD WILSON • VERN FEARING

# AMAZING STORIES

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# *Little Tin Soldier*

BY BILL PETERS

*This is 1982, and you don't buy a new car, you buy a shining new robot guaranteed to do everything but psychoanalyze the cat. You need no gas, oil, or collision insurance with these models, but there is a question involved: Are robots here to stay?*

June 17, 1982,  
Samuel Bell,  
Danville, Ohio

The Household Robot Co.,  
12 River Street,  
Chicago, Illinois.

Gentlemen:

You will find me listed on your books as purchaser of one of your S-25 Household Robots. You know nothing of me, personally, of course, but the very fact that we bought one of the first robots you put on the market, should indicate to you that Helen—my wife—and I are very modern, forward-looking people who like to keep abreast of the times. So it was with much interest that we received delivery of

the six-foot crate in which you shipped our robot.

We unpacked it immediately and it was then that we found the printed sticker on its posterior—your note asking the purchaser to write in and let you know how he liked the robot and how well things went in general.

Hence this letter, as I like to be cooperative. Also, the robot is on its way back to Chicago, and I hope you will also be cooperative and return my money.

First off, getting Hey-You on his feet and functioning, wasn't the easiest job in the world. I am referring, of course, to the robot. My ten-year-old son, Johnny, named him, after hearing me read

the serial number stamped into the steel behind his right ear—AU-4.

We finally got the robot on its feet and propped against the wall. Then we opened the other box labeled *Vitalizing Unit*. There were ten pieces of mechanism in all, which made up this unit. They were supposed to go into the robot's head and were shipped separately—as you explained in the directions—because they might be damaged in transit if completely assembled at the factory.

They looked pretty complicated, spread out there on the floor, and I thought I was stumped. But you pooh-pooed my apprehension in your direction manual by stating that a ten-year-old child could assemble and install them.

Therefore, it might interest you to know that that was exactly what happened. I went down into the basement for some tools and had a little difficulty in locating them. When I went back upstairs, there was Hey-You, completely assembled and my son, Johnny, standing there looking pretty proud of himself. He said, "Look what I did, Dad! It said in the book I could do it and I did!"

I was proud of him and pat-

ted him on the head. Now there was nothing to do but push the button under the robot's left arm and he'd begin functioning.

Helen was looking dubiously at the robot. As I advanced toward it and reached out to push the button, she said, "It's pretty big, Sam. I hope it doesn't—"

I pushed the button.

"—tear out a door frame."

Whereupon, the robot's eyes lighted up, gears clicked faintly inside it, and it walked over to the open door leading into the kitchen. As we stared in horror, it took the door frame in its two steel hands, applied a little pressure, and tore the whole frame out by the roots.

Helen screamed. The robot turned, dropped the door frame on the floor with a resounding crash, and stood there awaiting further orders.

So I have news for you gentlemen. In future guide books, you'd better delete the assertion that a ten-year-old can put the mechanical brain into your Household Robot. Either that or append the statement to read any ten-year-old child—*genius*. Our Johnny is an average, bright American kid, and he missed by quite a distance.



I shut Hey-You off and dismantled the vitalizing unit and found Johnny had crossed some wires in a manner that short circuited the selective device in the *command differential*. Thus, the robot obeyed any and all commands given—out of context—or in any other manner.

So, as nearly as we could figure it, I'd snapped the switch just in time for the robot to hear the last few words of Helen's remark: "—tear out a door frame." The robot obeyed with an efficiency that was appalling.

I don't suppose I have the right to hold you responsible for the damage to my house, though. No doubt, if pressed, you would come up with a ten-year-old who could install the unit correctly. Therefore, I had the door-frame replaced at my own expense, and we'll forget that part of it.

But there is more—much more—as you'll soon discover.

We were somewhat shaken, as you can no doubt readily imagine, by our first experience with Hey-You, so we didn't feel up to any more experimentation that evening. I spent an hour or so checking and rechecking the vitalizing unit to see that I had it in correctly and then we called it a day. When I saw how amaz-

ingly ingenious the unit was, I lost my apprehension and was again glad I'd bought the robot.

But Helen was still extremely dubious. When we were in bed for the night, she said, "Sam, did I ever tell you about my great-grandfather, Hubert?"

"I don't think you did," I replied.

"Well, a long time ago—1910, I think it was, he bought an automobile."

"That was nice."

"No it wasn't."

"Why not?"

"Well, it was one of the first automobiles ever built and they weren't anything like the cars of today."

"Naturally."

"Great-grandfather Hubert liked to be modern and all that—"

"Just the way we want to be—first with the latest."

"That's right, so he bought this automobile and drove it home. When he steered it into the new garage he'd built, something went wrong. The automobile kept right on going—right through the rear wall of the garage and into the pig-pen where it killed six of his prize swine."

"I'll bet he was pretty mad."

"Mad is scarcely the word.

He sued the automobile company and lost and that made him even madder."

"But there was nothing more he could do about it."

"Oh, yes, there was. Great-grandfather Hubert was president of the County Board and had a lot of power. He pushed through a local law forbidding anyone to drive an automobile on any county road. He said they were addled experiments and obviously not here to stay."

"But he was wrong."

"He never admitted it."

"But the law had to be repealed."

"Yes, but he made it very hard for the automobile manufacturers. He finally allowed cars on the road, but he slipped through another law that somebody had to walk ahead of every car warning people out of the way."

"And right up to the end—with millions of cars on the road—he swore they were but a passing fancy."

"Wasn't that the grandfather who insisted on being hauled to the cemetery by a team of horses?"

"Yes. They had an awful time finding two horses."

"Very interesting, darling, but why do you bring it up now?"

"Because I remembered

Great-grandfather Hubert when that monster tore out the door frame tonight. The situation was so similar to his disaster with the automobile."

"And you think perhaps robots aren't here to stay?"

"Well, maybe they are and maybe they aren't, but Great-grandfather Hubert never stepped into an automobile and he lived to be ninety-one."

"So—?"

"I think we should get rid of the robot. Somehow I can't visualize any of us living very long with the thing in the house."

I comforted her and explained very carefully what had happened in both cases. The brakes on Great-grandfather Hubert's car had gone bad and we hadn't assembled the brain of our robot correctly. Both items came under the heading of correctable mechanical failures and should be viewed as such.

She finally agreed and we went to sleep.

The next day I left home early to visit a client in Ohio, so I was out of town all day and didn't get back until quite late. When I arrived home, Helen and Johnny came running out to the garage to meet me. Johnny appeared

quite excited, and Helen was obviously distraught. "Anything wrong?" I inquired.

"Hey-You's gone nuts!" Johnny informed me.

"What do you mean?"

"He's washing the dishes!" Helen cried. "For heaven's sake—do something!"

"Washing the dishes? What's so terrible about that?"

"He's been washing them all day—over and over again! He won't stop!"

"I could push the button, but Mom won't let me."

"I should say I won't. It's too dangerous!"

We'd been walking toward the house and now I stood in the back doorway and saw the robot doing what seemed to be an expert job. It stood at the sink washing plates and placing them carefully on the drain board. He finished with what were in the sink and then got a towel and began drying them.

"Stop him," Helen said, "or he'll have all the gold washed off."

"It's neuter, my dear. Not masculine."

"I don't care—make it stop."

"It won't respond to command?"

"I've begged and pleaded.

I've argued. I've tried to appeal to its reason—"

"It has no reason, dear."

"I know that! All it has is a mania for washing dishes. Stop it!"

"I walked over and pushed the button and the robot immediately became immobile.

Helen sank into a chair. "I thought maybe everything would be all right this morning," she said, "So—after you were gone—I said to it: 'Wash the dishes.'"

"You spoke slowly—as it said in the guide book?"

"Yes, and the robot went to work immediately. It washed all the dirty dishes and put them away. Then it got them out and washed them over again. Then it got out my good dishes—every dish in the house, in fact—and it's been washing them ever since. It wouldn't stop."

"You had only to push the button."

Helen shuddered. "I went close to it once and it snarled at me."

"Nonsense. The mechanism is new. The joints have to be broken in."

"But why wouldn't it quit?"

"I'll check it over after supper and see."

Helen got supper herself



after which, I took the vitalizing unit apart and found what was wrong. The revolving gear—the one that moves the mechanism which cleans the memory tape—had stuck. Of course the robot could receive no new orders and the last command—the one to wash dishes—remained in the functional position.

I had quite a time with Helen that evening. She made me march Hey-You off into a corner and leave it there. I explained what had happened—how ordinary mechanical error had been responsible for the mishaps, and how truly wonderful the robot was—how man's ingenuity had fashioned a mechanism that could actually think for itself and lift away many burdens with which mankind had been saddled for years.

Helen remained skeptical. She said she was personally fond of some of the burdens of mankind and felt we really shouldn't have things too easy. She suggested that if God had wanted us to have robots, He would have provided them free of charge.

I showed her the fallacy of this line of argument—that the same had been spoken of the steam engine, the airplane, the automobile, and just about every invention

down through the ages. No doubt, I reminded her, some cave man once said: "If God had wanted man to have the wheel, he'd have given him round feet."

Helen was unconvinced, and upon that note, we went to sleep.

The next day I remained home and gave all my time to the robot, feeling that Helen had to be made to appreciate it or we'd get nowhere. I took the vitalizing unit apart, went over it carefully and put it together again. Then I re-read the instruction book and gave a demonstration of what a wonderful work-saver a robot is.

The demonstration left nothing to be desired. Hey-You, responding to my orders, washed the car, helped the carpenter repair the broken doorway, got lunch, mowed the lawn, and changed a tire.

Helen was impressed, so I struck while the iron was hot, and put Hey-You through some really intricate paces. The robot, under our astonished eyes, took Johnny's amateur radio station apart and put it together again. I went even further. My son, Johnny, is also interested in chemistry and has a laboratory of sorts in our basement. We took Hey-You down there

and it swiftly put together some very complicated chemical formulae.

Then we went back upstairs and the robot baked biscuits, creamed some chicken, and made us a delightful lunch. That seemed to convince Helen that she'd been wrong. The tension she'd been under relaxed noticeably, and I felt my point had been won. And after Johnny began giving the robot orders which it obeyed promptly and perfectly, I was sure we'd have Hey-You around for the rest of our lives.

Johnny took to the robot immediately. He called Hey-You his little tin soldier, and treated us to a demonstration of precision marching on the front lawn that brought the neighbors out of their houses to watch.

So everything was fine—or so I thought. A week passed, with Helen and Johnny sharing the use of the robot. After Hey-You had done the household chores for Helen, Johnny took over and initiated the robot into the mysteries of his childish games. I was fortunate if I could get a little of the robot's time for washing the car, painting the back fence, and things like that.

It was on a Wednesday—

the third week after Hey-You's arrival, that he disappeared. When I got home that night, Helen was questioning Johnny.

"But you were both in the backyard. You must have seen him go away."

Johnny said, "I didn't see him go. I went down the street to give Eddy Kane back his football. When I got back, it was dark and I thought Hey-You was in the house. I didn't see him go anywhere."

Helen turned to me. "The robot's gone, Sam. How could a robot as big as Hey-You just disappear? And why would he go away?"

"Maybe something went wrong in his head," Johnny suggested.

"Now there's nothing to worry about," I said. "If he's wandered away, there's no great harm done. Somebody will see him and call us."

We sat around all evening, waiting for the call, but it didn't come. By ten o'clock I was worried. It certainly looked as though our robot had been stolen. That was something that had never occurred to be, but it was logical. It wouldn't be too difficult for a thief to talk the robot into leaving us. Very simple in fact. But Danville,

Ohio, is a rather small town and I couldn't conceive of any local person doing such a thing.

However, I called Tom Welker, our Chief of Police and he came over to the house. He said, "So you think somebody stole your robot, Eh, Sam?"

"Frankly, I don't know, but I can't think of any other answer."

"Well, let's get the details. Who saw him—it, last?" Tom took out a notebook and waited.

"Johnny, I guess." I gave him the details.

"Maybe I'd better talk to Johnny."

I called the lad up from the basement where he'd been working in his chemistry lab. "Did you find Hey-You?" he asked of Tom.

"No, son, but I will. Tell me—did you see any suspicious characters in the street—around the house?"

"Uh-huh—I didn't see anybody. Hey-You and I were working on a project."

"Is that so? What project?"

"One out of a comic book I've got."

"Just what was this project, Johnny?"

"It was to blow up the earth."

Helen gasped. "Johnny!

What kind of games are you—?"

"It was fun, Mom. Especially with Hey-You. He was the villain and I was the good guy. In the comic book there was Latso—he was the villain and he had a cave somewhere and he came up with a machine that would set off a chemical formula that would blow up the earth, and I was Bill Dare, the good guy and I had to stop him at the last minute."

I felt the hair tighten on my head. "And did you stop him, son?"

"Well, we never got that far. Latso had made the chemical formula and the machine, and—"

Tom Welker was fiddling with his notebook. He said, "I guess none of that's very important—"

"You'd be surprised how important it is!" I snapped. Then I turned to Johnny. "Now son, think hard! The cave Latso was supposed to hide in—where is it?"

"We didn't have one, Dad. I was going to use the basement."

I'd had enough experience with Hey-You to know what to do—if we had time. I said, "Tom—we've got to work fast or this town's liable to go up

in a burst of glory. Do you know of any holes around close?"

He gaped. "Holes? What are you talking about?"

"Caves, man—caves! You know, where that robot could hide. Think!"

"I don't know of any caves in town—there aren't any."

"Then he must have made one of his own. We've got to call the army post over at Dayton—fast!"

"What on earth do we want of the army?"

I didn't take time to answer. I got on the phone and put the call through and inside an hour, a squad of soldiers arrived. They carried the equipment necessary to locate underground bombs and such, and they went to work.

It took three hours to find Hey-You, because the device kept signaling for old sewer pipes, buried scrap metal and what not. But they finally located the robot in a grown-over, long-unused well two blocks away. Hey-You had camouflaged the entrance

very carefully, just like it said in the comic book. It had its machine ready to detonate the chemical bomb it had made, and the soldiers said that while the bomb would hardly have destroyed the earth, it would have made a grand mess of the town.

The village fathers were pretty scared and pretty indignant and they immediately passed a law barring robots from the city limits and I think maybe the law will stand for a long time.

Frankly, I doubt, now, that robots are here to stay and will do everything in my power to stem their march of progress.

So, as I asked in the beginning of this letter, please be cooperative and return my money. You'll still come out way ahead, because, on the strength of the information furnished herein, you'll be able to recall all the other robots you've sold before disaster strikes and you are sued for everything you have.

Sincerely,  
Samuel Bell.