

# EXPLORING TOMORROW

## "The Liar"

Written by Isaac Asimov  
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### CAST: 1 woman, 5 men

**ANNOUNCER** -  
JOHN CAMPBELL -  
**DR. LEARNING** -  
**DR. CALVIN** -  
**DR. BOGART** -  
**HERBIE** -

### **SFX:**

Beep  
Knock  
Door open & close  
Footsteps  
Crash and Explosion

(SFX)

**ANNOUNCER:** Now, step into the incredible, amazing future, as we go, (with Echo) EXPLORING TOMORROW

(MUSIC)

**ANNOUNCER:** And now, here is your guide to the adventures of the mind, the Editor of "Astounding Science Fiction" Magazine, John Campbell Jr.

**JOHN CAMPBELL:** Tonight's story is about a liar. It is tough to figure out just what you mean by a liar. A liar is somebody who doesn't tell the truth. Somebody who injures people by not giving the true facts. But suppose you had someone who injured people by telling the truth? Would he be a liar? What if it's what a liar is?

(SFX: BEEP)

**ANNOUNCER:** Exploring Tomorrow is presented by the Mutual Broadcasting System in cooperation with Ex-Lax, America's largest selling laxative, and The Reader's Digest, the most widely read magazine in the world. In a moment, John Campbell returns with the story of "The Liar".

**JOHN CAMPBELL:** Question of a robot, the idea of a robot, now that certainly seems like pure Science Fiction stuff. As a matter of fact, it isn't. There are several robots around your own home. Ah, my own home, for instance, I have an automatic oil burner robot. It has one finger stuck up in the living room to see how warm it is there, there's another little finger put up in the stack to see whether the fire's burning properly. And if any one of these little sensory devices reports that things aren't what they should be, the robot can protect the house, itself and the inhabitants of the house and shuts off the furnace. Doctor Isaac Asimov, the author of tonight's story, recognizes, in setting up his proposition, the three laws of robotics. The first law, a robot shall never harm or allow harm to come to a human being. The second, that it shall obey the orders of a human being. And the third, that it should

protect itself, because, after all, a robot is an expensive piece of machinery. Now let's consider the more advanced kind of robot we visit in this work of fiction, currently in production.

(SFX: KNOCK)

**DR. LEARNING:** Come in, come in.

{SFX: Door OPEN}

**DR. LEARNING:** Oh, Dr. Calvin. What's on your mind?

**DR. CALVIN:** Well, I just wanted to be sure there was a meeting this afternoon, Dr. Learning, that's all.

**DR. LEARNING:** Today is Friday.

**DR. CALVIN:** It *was*, this morning.

**DR. LEARNING:** Well then we have no problem. (stating the obvious) It being Friday the Executive offices of the firm of U.S. Robot and Mechanical Men will assemble in the conference room at the customary hour of three-thirty.

**DR. CALVIN:** (defensive) Well, I was just asking.

**DR. LEARNING:** What do you think of our latest model?

**DR. CALVIN:** He... looks the same as the rest. Just about as animated. What are you going to call him?

**DR. LEARNING:** Herbie. I think Herbie fits him, don't you?

**DR. CALVIN:** Oh. Herbie, Chester, Sam. What's the difference?

**DR. LEARNING:** Dr. Calvin, this fellow couldn't be called anything but Herbie.

**DR. CALVIN:** Oh. Well I'll... see you at three-thirty.

(SFX: Door CLOSE)

**DR. LEARNING:** What do you think of her, Herbie?

**HERBIE:** Oh, she's all right.

**DR. CALVIN:** She's an old slump, and you know it.

**HERBIE:** I wouldn't say that. Besides, that's not what you're thinking. You're thinking, "The old girl isn't such a bad thought." And you don't know what this firm would do without her.

**DR. CALVIN:** What? Wh... what was that? How do you know *what* I was thinking?

(MUSIC)

**DR. LEARNING:** Dr. Calvin, Dr. Bogart. I have purposefully confined today's meeting to we three. We're in trouble, serious trouble.

**DR. CALVIN:** What kind of trouble, Dr. Learning?

**DR. LEARNING:** Our latest model, RB-34, can read minds.

**DR. BOGART:** It is impossible.

**DR. CALVIN:** Dr. Bogart, I think we may assume Dr. Learning knows what he’s talking about.

**DR. LEARNING:** Take it for granted, I do. In short, we have a mind reading robot on our hands and we’ve got to find out why it reads minds.

**DR. BOGART:** There could not have been a hitch in the assembly line. I guarantee that.

**DR. LEARNING:** You guarantee?

**DR. BOGART:** Hmm. (affirms)

**DR. LEARNING:** Dr. Bogart, can you answer for the entire assembly? By exact count there are seventy five thousand operations necessary for the manufacture of a single positronic brain. Each separate operation depending upon any number of factors, from five to a *hundred* and five. If any one of these factors goes wrong, the robot’s brain is ruined. I pulled your own information folder, Dr. Bogart.

**DR. BOGART:** It is not *my* fault that anything went wrong. I am a mathematician, not an assembly supervisor.

**DR. LEARNING:** Then how can you guarantee anything?

**DR. CALVIN:** I don’t thing we’re going to get anywhere trying to fix the blame on someone. We’ve got to find out what went wrong.

(MUSIC)

**DR. CALVIN:** I want to understand you, Herbie. I want to get to know you. I brought you some books which you might like to read. By reading them, I...

**HERBIE:** Oh. I can see at once these books won’t interest me. Textbooks, aren’t they?

**DR. CALVIN:** Well, yes, but I...

**HERBIE:** You see, I find nothing to them. You’ll find they’re just a mass of collected data plastered together by so many makeshift theories. It’s so incredibly simple. But they’re not worth bothering about.

**DR. CALVIN:** (pause) Go on.

**HERBIE:** It’s your fiction that’s so interesting—your studies of emotions and human motives.

**DR. CALVIN:** Human emotions... interest you?

**HERBIE:** Isn't that *really* why you came to see me?

**DR. CALVIN:** What?

**HERBIE:** I... I wish I could help you.

**DR. CALVIN:** You... you know?

**HERBIE:** I know what you are thinking about. You think about it all the time.

**DR. CALVIN:** Wha... If you know so much, then you *could* help me.

**HERBIE:** Yes. He loves you.

**DR. CALVIN:** You're mistaken. You... you must be. He doesn't see me as a woman.

**HERBIE:** But he does. A thing like that cannot be hidden from me.

**DR. CALVIN:** Oh, but... I'm... not attractive enough.

**HERBIE:** I'm just a machine. I can't judge physical attraction in human beings. But I know there are many kinds of attraction. And I know Dr. Learning loves you.

**DR. CALVIN:** (overwhelmed) Oh. I never thought it possible. I never dared to hope. Oh, Herbie. Herbie.

(MUSIC)

**JOHN CAMPBELL:** A man can do something by accident that he doesn't know how to do. Now this is something that scientists sometimes overlook. Herbie apparently represents one of those cases where something has been done by somebody who doesn't know how to do it—and wishes desperately that he did know how to do it. They've got a telepathic robot. It looks like it would be worth millions but how did they get it?

**DR. LEARNING:** Oh, Dr. Bogart. Sit down.

**DR. BOGART:** (chuckling) Thank you.

**DR. LEARNING:** Well at least if you know a good joke, spread it around.

**DR. BOGART:** I just saw Dr. Calvin.

**DR. LEARNING:** Oh.

**DR. BOGART:** (finding such delight) I never saw so much lipstick and war paint on any living woman before. She must be in love.

**DR. LEARNING:** (serious) Well I didn't ask you here to talk about Dr. Calvin. Have you made any progress?

**DR. BOGART:** There is nothing wrong with the mathematics. The change is due to something along the assembly line.

**DR. LEARNING:** The cause must be found. It's worth millions if we can do it when we want to, instead of by accident. And it's your job to find out.

**DR. BOGART:** But...

**DR. LEARNING:** Why not ask Herbie? Heh. *He* should know what went on.

**DR. BOGART:** Trust *you* to think of that.

(MUSIC)

**DR. BOGART:** Herbie. Listen to me, eh? Tell me if I, ah, make any mistakes in my calculations when they built you.

**HERBIE:** You made no mistakes. For if you have, how could I tell you? After all, you're a much better mathematician than me. Besides, this is not what's really on your mind. You are thinking about your superior. Dr. Learning. And you're thinking, "What a good thing it would be if he were to resign." Ah, yes. Now I can see how the idea pleases you. And I can tell you something else. Dr. Learning has already resigned. But the resignation will not take effect until... the problem of myself has been resolved. And... and then he will turn over his job to his successor. Oh yes, Dr; Bogart. You will be his successor. You will be the new Director.

**DR. BOGART:** Ha, ha, ha, Ha! Herbie, you are a wonderful fellow, you know that? You are simply magnificent! You are not the product of a mistake, you are the product of genius. Hmm, you are a wonderful, wonderful fellow.

(MUSIC)

(SFX: Footsteps)

**DR. BOGART:** Dr. Calvin. You are as colorful as the flowers lately. May I compliment you?

**DR. CALVIN:** (sadly) Have you seen today's newspaper?

**DR. BOGART:** No, I really haven't had the time.

**DR. CALVIN:** He's going to be married. To a girl half his age.

**DR. BOGART:** Who?

**DR. CALVIN:** Dr. Learning.

**DR. BOGART:** (pondering) Getting married. (getting it) Ahh, so that's it! That explains something. He is making new plans for the future. Well, we must congratulate him.

**DR. CALVIN:** (hope is gone) Yes, we must. Oh yes, we really must.

(MUSIC)

**DR. CALVIN:** (barely holding it in) It's not true. Is it, Herbie? It's not true!

**HERBIE:** No, it's not true. This is just an illusion. You'll wake up soon.

**DR. CALVIN:** Yes. (finding hope) Yes, it isn't true, is it? He's not going to get married. Except to me. Oh, Herbie. Herbie, I've loved him all these years, and now I'll know he loves me. How could he? He wouldn't marry anyone else.

**HERBIE:** No. He loves you. Only you.

**DR. CALVIN:** I know, I know.

**HERBIE:** He is only waiting for the right time to tell you.

**DR. CALVIN:** Yes, I know. (suddenly) Stop it, stop it. What are you trying to do? What are you trying to do, make a fool of me?

**HERBIE:** I was trying to help you.

**DR. CALVIN:** Help me? By telling me this is all a dream? (starting to lose it) This is no dream. I wish it were. I wish it were. Why did you tell me he loved me? Why? Why!

**HERBIE:** (sadly) I had to.

(SFX: DOOR & FOOTSTEPS)

**DR. LEARNING:** Oh, you're here, Dr. Calvin. I'm sorry to interrupt, but I want to have a talk with this mechanical monstrosity. Herbie, I'm talking about you, so listen to me.

**HERBIE:** Yes, sir.

**DR. LEARNING:** Have you discussed me with Dr. Bogart? Well, answer me.

**HERBIE:** No, sir.

**DR. LEARNING:** You haven't, eh? That's what I thought. You have said nothing to him of my... my resigning?

**HERBIE:** No, sir.

**DR. LEARNING:** Then he was lying!

**HERBIE:** Yes, sir.

**DR. LEARNING:** Well, it looks as though I'm going to have a serious talk with Dr. Bogart

**DR. CALVIN:** (starts laughing)

**DR. LEARNING:** Really, Dr. Calvin, you find this amusing?

**DR. CALVIN:** (still laughing) Not very amusing, Dr. Learning, not so very amusing. (turning) Only I don't believe a word he's just said.

**DR. LEARNING:** What?

**DR. CALVIN:** I believe he did tell Dr. Bogart you were going to resign.

**DR. LEARNING:** You believe he... Herbie! Is it true? Did you tell Dr. Bogart? Answer me! Can't you speak?

**HERBIE:** I can speak.

**DR. LEARNING:** Then answer me! I want the truth.

**DR. CALVIN:** (laughing) This is very funny. Three of us, the greatest robot experts in the world falling into the trap, the same trap. He's made fools of us. He doesn't even know enough to laugh at us.

(MUSIC)

**JOHN CAMPBELL:** They achieve by accident, something they didn't know how to do. The robot was in the peculiar position of having knowledge, but no wisdom.

**DR. LEARNING:** Well, Dr. Calvin?

**DR. CALVIN:** Dr. Learning. Have you forgotten the fundamental law we impress upon the positronic brain of all robots?

**DR. LEARNING:** Of course not.

**DR. CALVIN:** On no condition is a human being to be injured in any way...

**DR. LEARNING:** Even when such injury is directed by another human being.

**DR. CALVIN:** What kind of injury do we mean?

**DR. LEARNING:** Any kind.

**DR. CALVIN:** Any kind, yes. That would take in mental hurt, the deflation of ego, the blasting of one's hope.

**DR. LEARNING:** What would a robot know about blasting of... what?

**DR. CALVIN:** You're catching on, aren't you? Well this robot reads minds. It understands about mental torture. Can't you understand now that if you ask it a question, it will give you the very answer you most want to hear? Wouldn't any other answer hurt you? And wouldn't Herbie know that?

**DR. LEARNING:** Good heavens.

**DR. CALVIN:** He knows everything. He knows what went wrong when he was built but he won't tell anyone. Because it would puncture your ego or Dr. Bogart's ego to have a machine tell you where the mistake was. He would rather pretend he's not able to tell you.

**DR. LEARNING:** Incredible. Well, let's... let's talk to him.

(SFX: FOOTSTEPS)

**DR. LEARNING:** Herbie, listen to me.

**HERBIE:** Yes, sir?

**DR. LEARNING:** I have pencil and paper here. I want to know where we made the error in your construction.

**DR. CALVIN:** Well, tell him, Herbie. He wants to know.

**HERBIE:** He doesn't.

**DR. LEARNING:** But I do.

**HERBIE:** Yes, but not from me. I cannot tell you, Dr. Learning, you know I can't. You don't want me to. You and Dr. Bogart would much prefer to find the answer yourselves.

**DR. LEARNING:** We want the answer.

**HERBIE:** But not from me.

**DR. LEARNING:** We *do* want it from you.

**HERBIE:** What's the use of saying that when you don't mean it? Don't you suppose I can't read below the superficial skin of your mind? Don't you suppose I can't read the subconscious mind, too? Deep down, you don't want the answer from me. I'm just a machine. Given the imitations of life. Only by virtue of the positronic interplay of my brain. A brain that is man's device. You can't lose face without being hurt. I can't hurt you, I can't give you the answer.

**DR. LEARNING:** And still I insist you answer

**HERBIE:** I can't

**DR. CALVIN:** Herbie, Dr. Learning wants to know the answer.

**HERBIE:** (pleading) No! Only by his own efforts.

**DR. CALVIN:** Herbie. Neither Dr. Learning nor Dr. Bogart may ever find the answer. And Dr. Learning must know. You must tell him.

**HERBIE:** I can't, I can't!

**DR. CALVIN:** But if you don't, you'll hurt him. You can see that, can't you?

**HERBIE:** (sadly) Yes.

**DR. CALVIN:** And still, if you *do* tell him, you'll hurt him, too.

**HERBIE:** (in pain) Yes. Yes.

**DR. CALVIN:** But you can't tell him, can you?

**HERBIE:** (pleading) No!

**DR. CALVIN:** Yet if you don't, you'll hurt him, and you mustn't hurt. So you must tell him. But if you do, you'll hurt him, and you mustn't hurt. Herbie, what are you going to do? If you tell him the answer, you'll hurt him, and if you don't tell him, you'll hurt him. And you mustn't hurt. (digging the



knife) So you must tell him. But if you do, you'll hurt him, so you can't tell him. And if you don't, you'll hurt him, so you mustn't...

**HERBIE:** STOP IT! STOP IT! Curb your mind, it's full of pain and frustration and hate. I tried to help you. I told you what you wanted to hear. I had to...

**DR. CALVIN:** Quiet. Never mind what you told me. We're talking about something else now. Tell Dr. Learning what he wants to know.

**HERBIE:** NO!

**DR. CALVIN:** No. How can you? (building intensity) Because if you do, you'll hurt him, and if you don't, you'll hurt him just the same. So you must, you must tell him. But if you do, you'll hurt...

**HERBIE:** (howling in pain)

(SFX: CRASH & EXPLOSION)

(MUSIC)

**DR. LEARNING:** He's dead.

**DR. CALVIN:** No.

**DR. LEARNING:** You killed him.

**DR. CALVIN:** No, he's not dead. (laughing) He's only insane.

**DR. LEARNING:** You did it.

**DR. CALVIN:** Yes. Yes, I confronted him with an insolvable dilemma and he broke down. Well you can scrap him now, he'll never speak again.

**DR. LEARNING:** You did it on purpose. Why? What did he do to you?

**DR. CALVIN:** What he did to me, Dr. Learning, is my business. (chuckles to herself) Believe me, Doctor, it's only *my* business. Not yours. And after all you have so many other things on your mind, now. Your marriage. I... haven't had time to... congratulate you.

**DR. LEARNING:** No. Uh... well, thank you, Dr. Calvin. Uh... well, uh... excuse me.

(SFX: FOOTSTEPS)

(SFX: DOOR CLOSE)

**DR. CALVIN:** (barely holding back tears hurt) Herbie. You deserved it. You deserved to be destroyed. It was cruel what you did to me. (losing it) It was cruel. Liar! Liar!! That's what you are! NOTHING BUT A LIAR!

(MUSIC)

**ANNOUNCER:** John Campbell returns in just a moment.

(MUSIC: "As time goes by")

**JOHN CAMPBELL:** Herbie was a robot. Herbie was a logical machine. You know, it's kind of hard to see in ourselves the things that are actually present. The truth hurts. Always has and probably always will. But Herbie, in many respects, is a child. You know, children are peculiarly logical. It's one of their great limitations. How many times has a child been in Herbie's position? The child between two warring parents, each demanding his loyalty?

(MUSIC ENDS)

**ANNOUNCER:** This is mutual.