

# I, Robot

## Isaac Asimov

### A Before Reading

- 1 a *I, Robot* is a collection of science-fiction stories about robots, which were written in the 1940s and imagined life in the future (around 1998-2035). Write a list of words or expressions that you think you might find in these stories about robots.

Examples: *space, computer,*

As you start reading, look out for your words.

- b Have you read any other science fiction stories or seen any science fiction films? Have you seen or heard of the movie *I, Robot* (2004)? Which actors are in it? Do you know if there is a connection between the film and the book?

Now read page 6 of the book to find out.

- 2 What do you know about the history of space travel? Complete the table with your ideas.

Who was the first man on the moon?	
What was his nationality?	
In which year did he land on the moon?	
What was the name of the first man-made satellite to explore space?	
When did the satellite go into space?	
Which country built this satellite?	
What are the names of the planets in the Solar System which have been explored by satellites?	

Now read page 5 of the book to check your answers.

## B While Reading

3 As you read, match the robots and main human characters to their descriptions.

Cutie	a The famous robot-psychologist
Gloria Weston	b A non-speaking robot, made to take care of children
Stephen Byerley	c A child who missed her 'nanny robot' when he was taken away
Nestor 10	d A robotics engineer who worked with Michael Donovan
Susan Calvin	e A very intelligent robot who believed he was made by 'The Master', not humans, and only believed in logic
Dave	f A master robot which controlled six sub-robots and was developed to work in the mines on asteroids, without human supervision
Gregory Powell	g A robot that was believed to read minds, but really just told people what they wanted to hear
Francis Quinn	h The director of U.S Robots
Robbie	i A modified robot whose brain was not impressed with the complete First Law of Robotics
Alfred Lanning	j A possible humanoid robot
Herbie	k A politician who wanted to show that the other election candidate was a robot

4 a When Asimov wrote these stories in the 1930s-1940s, there were not yet any robots or space travel. He was guessing or predicting the future. As you read, keep a record of his predictions which were correct and have now happened in reality and those which have not (yet) happened.

Correct predictions	Incorrect predictions/ not (yet) happened
	<i>Robots look and behave like humans and can think and feel.</i>

b In your opinion, how easy/difficult is it to imagine the future? Do you know any ways of predicting the future? How do you think the world will be different in 50 years' time? And in 100 years' time?

## C After Reading

- 5 a *I, Robot* describes different robots with different special powers and abilities. Imagine that you are buying a robot in the year 2050 and can choose 3 special powers and abilities for it from the list below. Which would you choose and why?

Robot abilities and powers:

To clean and do housework for you

To read the minds of other people and tell you what they are thinking

To transport you quickly around the world and into space

To teach you whatever you want to learn

To shop and cook for you

To organise parties for you

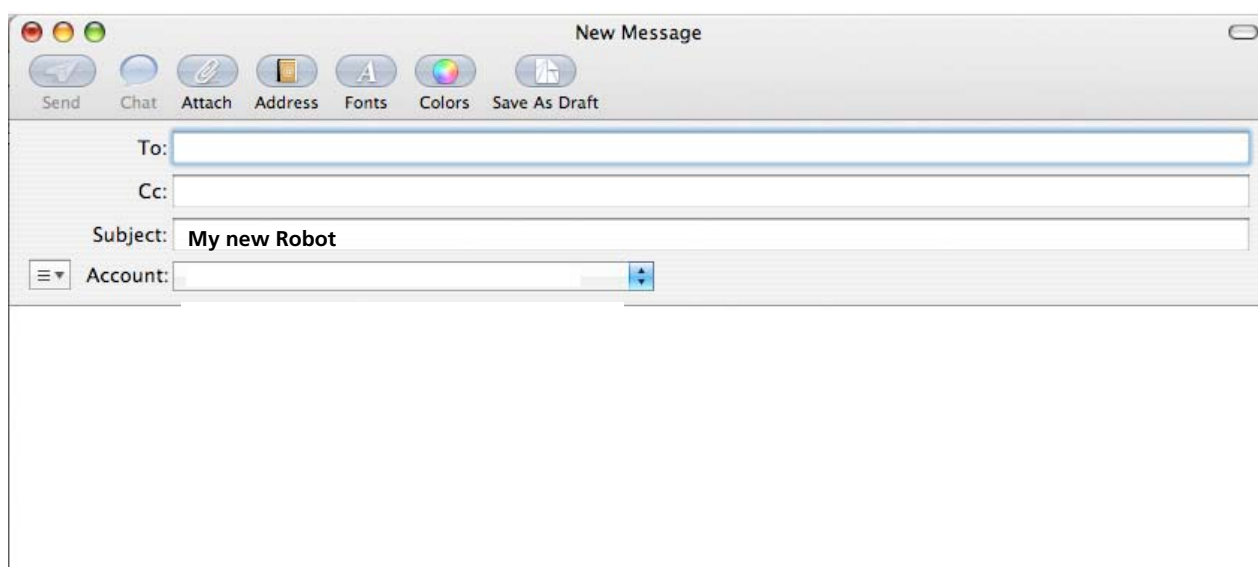
To remember the birthdays of friends and family and send them presents from you

To find you the perfect partner/boyfriend/girlfriend

To fight people you don't like

To look after you when you are ill

- b Are there any other special abilities you would like to give to your robot? In the future, do you think that robots will be able to do all the things in the list? Why/why not?
- c Write an email to a friend introducing your new robot and explaining his/her 3 special abilities. Describe how your life is now different as a result.



- 6 Imagine that you are the journalist who interviewed Susan Calvin in the book. Write a short article for 'The Interplanetary Press' based on what Susan told you before she died.

You should include:

- some facts about the life and career of Susan Calvin
- details of 2 or 3 of the robots she told you about
- her ideas about the advantages and dangers of robots
- a prediction for the future of robots

- 7 *"By 2002, U.S. Robots had invented speaking robots. But then many people protested about them. They were frightened. Robots now looked and behaved like humans, and people didn't like this. Between 2003 and 2007, most governments on Earth banned robots."* (page 20)
- a Do you think there is a real danger that robots could become too intelligent and powerful in the future? Will robots become (or are they already) better than humans? Will we need rules and laws to stop this?
- b Has the government in your country banned anything in the past or present? Do you think that they should ban any of the following?
- smoking in public places
  - political or religious groups with extreme opinions
  - violence on television
  - alcohol
  - advertisements for cigarettes
  - shops opening on Sundays or religious holidays
  - using mobile phones in quiet public places
  - fast food
  - journalists following and photographing famous people

Choose one of the subjects from the list and write a short paragraph saying why you think it should/should not be banned.