

# THOUGHTAUDIO



## LET'S GET TOGETHER

Written by  
ISAAC ASIMOV

Narrated by  
MICHAEL ANTHONY SCOTT

Adaptations by  
GARCIA MANN

Produced by  
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A kind of peace had endured for a century and people had forgotten what anything else was like. They would scarcely have known how to react had they discovered that the inevitable war had finally come.

Certainly, Elias Lynn, Chief of the Bureau of Robotics, wasn't sure how he ought to react when he finally found out. The Bureau of Robotics was headquartered in Cheyenne, in line with the century-old trend toward decentralization. Lynn stared dubiously at the young Security officer from Washington who had brought the news.

Elias Lynn was a large man, charmingly homely, with pale blue eyes that bulged a bit. Men weren't usually comfortable under the stare of those eyes, but the Security officer remained calm.

Lynn's first reaction was incredulity! He just didn't believe it!

He eased himself back in his chair and looked at the Security officer. "How certain is the information?"

The Security officer, who had introduced himself as Ralph G. Breckenridge had already presented his credentials to Lynn. He had the softness of youth about him; full lips, plump cheeks that flushed easily, and guileless eyes. His clothing was out of place in Cheyenne, but it perfectly suited an air-conditioned Washington office. Security, despite the decentralization that had taken place, was still centered there.

"There's no doubt about it," answered Breckenridge, his face becoming flushed with the question.

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"You people know all about *Them*, I suppose," said Lynn and was unable to keep a trace of sarcasm out of his tone. He was not particularly aware of his use of a slightly stressed pronoun in his reference to the enemy, the equivalent of capitalization in print. It was a cultural habit of this generation and also of the one preceding it to refer to the enemy as *THEY*. No one said the "East," or the "Reds" or the "Soviets" or the "Russians" anymore. That would have been too confusing since some of *Them* were not of the East, were not Reds, not Soviets, and especially not Russians. It was much simpler to say *We* and *They*, and much more precise.

Travelers had frequently reported that *They* did the same in reverse. Over there, *They* were *We* — in the appropriate language — and *We* were *They*.

Scarcely anyone gave thought to such things anymore. It was all quite comfortable and casual. There was no hatred. In the beginning, it had been called a Cold War. Now it was only a game, almost a good-natured game, with unspoken rules and a kind of decency about it.

"Why should *They* want to disturb the situation?" asked Lynn abruptly,

He rose and stood staring at a map of the world on the wall, split into two regions with faint edgings of color. An irregular portion on the left of the map was edged in a mild green. A smaller but just as irregular portion on the right of the map was bordered in a washed-out pink — the colors indicating the demarcations of *We* and *They*.

The map hadn't changed much in a century. The loss of Taiwan and the gain of East Germany eighty years before had been the last territorial switch of importance.

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There had been another change, though, that was significant and also indicated in the colors. Two generations before, *Their* territory had been a brooding, bloody red, *Ours* a pure and undefiled white. Now there was neutrality about the colors. Lynn had seen *Their* maps and it was the same on *Their* side.

"*They* wouldn't do it," he said.

"*They* are doing it," said Breckenridge, "and you better accustom yourself to the fact. Of course, sir, I realize that it may not be pleasant to think that *They* may be that far ahead of us in robotics."

His eyes remained as guileless as ever, but the hidden knife edges of the words plunged deep, and Lynn quivered at the impact.

Of course, that would account for why the Chief of Robotics learned of this so late and through a Security officer at that. It symbolized the fact that he had lost status in the eyes of the Government; if Robotics had truly failed in the struggle, Lynn could expect no political mercy.

"Even if what you say is true, they're not that far ahead of us. We could build humanoid robots" said Lynn wearily.

"But have we actually accomplished it, sir?" asked Breckenridge.

"Yes. As a matter of fact, we have built a few models for experimental purposes," answered Lynn.

"*They* were doing that ten years ago. *They* have made ten years' progress since then," said Breckenridge.

Lynn was disturbed. He wondered if his incredulity concerning the whole business was in truth the result of wounded pride, fear for his job, and loss of his

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reputation. He was embarrassed by the possibility that this might be so, and yet he was forced into defending his position.

"Look, young man, the stalemate between *Them* and *Us* was never perfect in every detail. *They* have always been ahead in one facet or another, but we are ahead of them in other areas. If *They* are ahead of us right now in robotics, it's because *They* have placed a greater proportion of *Their* effort into robotics than *We* have. That means *Our* efforts in another branch of endeavor have received a greater share of effort than *Theirs*. It would mean *We* are ahead in force-field research or perhaps in hyper-atomics."

Lynn felt distressed at his own statement that the stalemate wasn't perfect. It was true enough, but that was the one great danger still threatening the world. The fact remained that the world depended on the stalemate being as perfect as possible. If the small unevenness that always existed became over-balanced too far in one direction or the other — then what?

At the beginning of the Cold War, both sides had developed thermonuclear weapons. War became unthinkable. Competition switched from the military to the economic and psychological and had stayed there ever since.

But there was always the driving effort on each side to break the stalemate, to develop a parry impeding the movement of the enemy, and then develop an assault that could not be parried by the enemy in time — something that would make war possible again. That was not because either side wanted war so desperately, but because both were afraid that the other side would make the crucial discovery of a critical advantage first.

For a hundred years, each side had kept the struggle even. In the process, peace had been maintained for a hundred years while, as byproducts of the

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continuously intensive research, force fields had been produced as well as solar energy, insect control, and robotics. Each side was making headway in the understanding of mentalics, which was the name given to the biochemistry and biophysics of thought. The intricacies of ideation were deemed the cutting edge of discovery for each side. Of course, each side already had its outposts on the Moon and on Mars. Mankind was advancing in giant strides under the forced draft where everyone in each country had to work in the military or on government projects for a period of five years. Many decided to make it their life career.

It was even necessary for both sides to be as decent and humane as possible in their interactions, lest through cruelty and tyranny, allies be made for the other side.

It was unthinkable that the stalemate would now be broken and that there would be war.

"I want to consult one of my men. I want his opinion," barked Lynn.

"Is he trustworthy?" asked Breckenridge.

Lynn looked disgusted. "Good Lord, what man in Robotics has not been investigated and cleared to death by your people? Yes, I vouch for him. If you can't trust a man like Humphrey Carl Laszlo, then we're in no position to face the kind of attack you say *They* are launching, no matter what else we do."

"I've heard of Laszlo," said Breckenridge.

"Good. Then does he pass your criterion?" asked Lynn.

"Yes," answered Breckenridge.

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"Then, I'll have him come in and we'll find out what he thinks about the possibility that robots could invade the United States."

"That's not exactly the issue at hand," said Breckenridge, softly. "You still don't accept the full truth. Find out what he thinks about the fact that robots have *already* invaded the United States."



Laszlo was the grandson of a Hungarian who had broken through the Iron Curtain, and he had a warranted above-suspicion feeling about himself because of it. He was thick-set and balding with a pugnacious look graven forever on his snub face, but his accent was clear Harvard, and he was excessively soft-spoken.

To Lynn, who was aware that after years of administration, he was no longer an expert in the various phases of modern robotics. Laszlo was a comforting warehouse for having complete knowledge of the subject matter. Lynn felt better because of the man's mere presence.

"What do you think Laszlo?" asked Lynn.

A scowl twisted Laszlo's face ferociously. "That *They* are that far ahead of us. That is completely incredible. It would mean *They* have produced humanoids that could not be differentiated from humans at close quarters. It would mean a considerable advance in robo-mentals."

"You're personally involved," said Breckenridge, coldly. "Leaving professional pride out of the picture for now, exactly why is it impossible that *They* are ahead of *Us*?"

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Laszlo shrugged. "I assure you that I'm well acquainted with *Their* literature on robotics. I know approximately where *They* are."

"You know approximately where *They* want you to *think They* are, is what you really mean," corrected Breckenridge. "Have you ever visited the other side?"

"I haven't," said Laszlo, shortly.

"Nor you, Dr. Lynn?" asked Breckenridge.

"No, I haven't either," answered Lynn.

"Has any robotics man visited the other side in twenty-five years?" Breckenridge asked the question with confidence, indicating he knew the answer.

For a matter of seconds, the atmosphere was heavy with thought. Discomfort crossed Laszlo's broad face, and with a sense of sudden insight he said, "As a matter of fact, *They* haven't held any conferences on robotics in a long time."

"In twenty-five years," said Breckenridge. "Isn't that significant?"

"Maybe," said Laszlo, reluctantly. "Something else bothers me, though. None of *Them* have ever come to *Our* conferences on robotics. None that I can remember."

"Were *They* invited?" asked Breckenridge.

Lynn, staring and worried, interposed quickly, "Of course they were invited."



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"Do *They* refuse attendance to any other types of scientific conferences *We* hold?" asked Breckenridge.

"I don't know," answered Laszlo. He was pacing the floor now. "I haven't heard of any cases. Have you, Chief?"

"No," answered Lynn.

Breckenridge continued, "Wouldn't you say it was as though *They* didn't want to be put in the position of having to return any such invitation? Or as though *They* were afraid one of *Their* men might talk too much?"

That was exactly how it seemed, and Lynn felt a helpless conviction that Security's story was true after he began to absorb everything he had heard.

Why else had there been no contact between either side on robotics? There had been a cross-fertilizing of researchers moving in both directions on a strictly one-for-one basis for years. There were many motives for interdisciplinary exchange, for example, an honest appreciation of the supra-national character of science; impulses of friendliness that are hard to wipe out completely in the individual human being; the desire to be exposed to fresh and interesting outlooks, and to have your own stale notions greeted by others as fresh and interesting.

The governments themselves were anxious that this would continue. There was always the obvious thought that by learning all you could and in turn exposing as little as possible, your own side would gain a strategic advantage from the exchange.

But not in the case of robotics. Not there.

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The realization dawned on Lynn that *We* had viewed robotics as an insignificant matter to carry so much conviction, and now to make matters worse to suddenly learn that *They* had been making major advancements in robotics all along. Lynn thought, darkly: We've taken the complacent way out.

Because the other side had done nothing publicly on robotics, it had been tempting to sit back smugly and be comfortable in the assurance of superiority. Why hadn't it seemed possible, even likely, that *They* were now hiding superior cards, a trump hand, to utilize it at the proper time?

Laszlo said, shakenly, "What do we do?" It was obvious that the same line of thought carried the same level of realization in him.

"What do we do?" parroted Lynn. It was hard to think right now of anything but of the complete horror that came with that paralyzing question.

There were ten humanoid robots somewhere in the United States, each one carrying a fragment of a TC bomb.

TC! The race for sheer horror in bomb one-upmanship had ended there. TC! Total Conversion! The sun was no longer a metric one could use for a unit of energy displacement when compared to TC. Total Conversion, TC, reduced the sun to a penny candle.

Ten humanoids, each completely harmless in separation, could, by the simple act of coming together, exceed critical mass — it was too horrible to contemplate.

Lynn rose to his feet heavily, the dark pouches under his eyes, which ordinarily lent his surly face a look of savage foreboding, now grew more prominent than ever. He said, "If that is true, then it's going to be up to us to

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figure out ways and means of telling a humanoid from a human and then finding the humanoids."

"How quickly?" muttered Laszlo.

Breckenridge answered in the tone of an Intelligence officer. "Not later than five minutes before they get together. The only problem facing us now is that we don't know when that will be."

Lynn nodded. "At least we know the situation facing us now."

Breckenridge turned to Lynn saying, "I've been ordered to bring you back to Washington for a conference as soon as possible."

Lynn raised his eyebrows. "All right," he muttered in compliance.

He wondered if he had delayed longer in being convinced that he would have been immediately replaced — and if some other Chief of the Bureau of Robotics might not be conferring in Washington right now. Suddenly, he earnestly wished that the exact situation he imagined had come to pass.



The First Presidential Assistant was sitting at the head of the conference table. Also in the room were the Secretary of Science, the Secretary of Security, Lynn himself, and Breckenridge. The five of them sat around a conference table in the dungeons of an underground fortress near Washington.

Presidential Assistant Jeffreys was an impressive man, handsome in a white-haired and just-a-trifle-jowly fashion, solid, thoughtful, and as unobtrusive politically, as a Presidential Assistant ought to be.

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He spoke decisively. "There are three questions that face us as I see it. First, *when* are the humanoids going to get together? Second, *where* are they going to get together? Third, how do we stop them *before* they get together?"

Secretary of Science Amberley nodded convulsively at that. He had been Dean of Northwestern Engineering before his appointment. He was thin, sharp-featured, and noticeably edgy. His forefinger traced slow circles on the table.

"As far as *when* they will get together," Amberley said. "I suppose it's definite that it won't be for some time."

"Why do you say that?" asked Lynn, sharply.

"They've been in the United States for at least a month already. At least that is what Security says," answered Amberley.

Lynn turned automatically to look at Breckenridge, and Secretary of Security Macalaster intercepted the glance. Macalaster then said to Lynn, "The information is reliable. Don't let Breckenridge's apparent youth fool you, Dr. Lynn. That's part of his value to us. Actually, he's 34 and has been with the department for ten years. He has been in Moscow for a year and without him, none of this terrible danger would be known to us. As it is, we have most of the details."

"Not the crucial ones," snapped Lynn.

Macalaster of Security smiled frostily. His heavy chin and close-set eyes were well-known to the public but almost nothing else about him was. He said, "We are all finitely human, Dr. Lynn. Agent Breckenridge has done a great deal."

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Presidential Assistant Jeffreys cut in. "Let us say we have a certain amount of time. If an action at this moment were necessary, there would have been an indication of irregularities before this. It seems likely that they are waiting for a specific time. If we knew the place, perhaps the time would become self-evident.

"If they are going to TC a target, they will want to cripple us as much as possible, so it would seem that a major city would have to be their target. In any case, a major metropolitan area is the only target worth a TC bomb. I think there are four possibilities: Washington, as the administrative center; New York, as the financial center; and Detroit and Pittsburgh as the two chief industrial centers."

Macalaster of Security interjected saying, "I vote for New York. Administration and industry have both been decentralized to the point where the destruction of any one particular city won't prevent instant retaliation."

"Then why New York?" asked Amberly of Science, perhaps more sharply than he intended. "Finance has been decentralized as well."

Macalaster of Security responded, "It's a question of morale. It is probable that they intend to destroy our will to resist, to induce surrender by the sheer horror of the first blow. The greatest destruction of human life would be in the New York Metropolitan area. "

"Pretty cold-blooded," muttered Lynn.

"I know," said Macalaster of Security, "but they're capable of it if they thought it would mean final victory with one stroke. Wouldn't we — well — crumble in that case?"

Presidential Assistant Jeffreys brushed back his white hair. "Let's assume the worst. Let's assume that New York will be destroyed sometime during the

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winter, preferably immediately after a serious blizzard when communications are at their worst and the disruption of utilities and food supplies in fringe areas will be most seriously affected. Now, the question is how do we stop *Them*?"

Amberley of Science could only say, "Finding ten men among three hundred and thirty-one million people is an awfully small needle in an awfully large haystack."

Jeffreys shook his head. "You have it wrong. Ten *humanoids* among three hundred and thirty-one million *humans*."

"No difference," said Amberley of Science. "We don't know that a humanoid can be differentiated from a human at sight. Probably not." He looked at Lynn. They all did.

Lynn said heavily, "In Cheyenne, we couldn't make one that could pass as human in the daylight."

"But *They* can," said Macalaster of Security, "and not only physically. We're sure of that. *They* have advanced mentalic procedures to the point where they can reel off the micro-electronic patterns of the brain and focus it on the positronic pathways of the robot."

Lynn stared. "Are you implying that *They* can create the replica of a human being complete with personality and memory?"

"I do," said Macalaster.

"Of specific human beings?" asked Lynn.

"That's right," answered Macalaster.

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"Is this also based on Agent Breckenridge's findings?" asked Lynn.

"Yes. The evidence can't be disputed," responded Macalaster.

Lynn bent his head in thought for a moment. Then he said, "Then ten men in the United States are not men but humanoids. But the originals would have had to be available to them. Otherwise, how would they be introduced into this country? With the radar network over the entire world border as tight as a drum, how could *They* introduce any individual — human or humanoid — without our knowing it?"

Macalaster answered, "It can be done. There are certain legitimate seepages across the border — businessmen, pilots, and even tourists. They're watched, of course, on both sides. Still, ten of them might have been kidnapped and used as models for humanoids. The humanoids would then be sent back in their place. Since we wouldn't expect such a substitution, it would pass us by unnoticed. If they were Americans to begin with, there would be no difficulty in their getting into the country. It's as simple as that."

"Are you sure that even their friends and family could not tell the difference?" asked Lynn.

"We must assume so. Believe me, we've been waiting for any report that might imply sudden attacks of amnesia or troublesome changes in personality. We've checked on thousands," answered Macalaster.

Amberley of Science stared at his fingertips. "I think ordinary measures won't work. The attack must come from the Bureau of Robotics, and I depend on the chief of that bureau."

Again, eyes turned sharply, expectantly, on Lynn.

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Lynn felt the bitterness from the entire group rise. It seemed to him that this was the primary intention of this conference all along and that they had already come to a predetermined conclusion. There was nothing said that had not been said before he arrived. He was sure of that. There was no obvious solution to the problem, and no one made any comprehensible suggestions. The conference was a device for the record, a device on the part of men who gravely feared defeat and who wished the responsibility for it placed clearly and unequivocally on someone else, and that was him.

Yet there was justice in it. It was in robotics that *We* had fallen short. Lynn was not merely Lynn. He was Lynn of Robotics and the responsibility had to be his.

After a short moment of reflection, Lynn said, "I will do what I can."



He spent a wakeful night and there was a haggardness about both body and soul when he sought and attained another interview with Presidential Assistant Jeffreys the next morning. Breckenridge was there, and though Lynn would have preferred a private conference, he could see the justice in the situation. It was obvious that Breckenridge had attained enormous influence with the government as a result of his successful Intelligence work. Well, why not?

Lynn said, "Sir, I am considering the possibility that we are hopping uselessly to enemy piping."

"In what way?" asked Presidential Assistant Jeffreys.

"I'm sure that however impatient the public may grow at times, and how legislators in times like this find it expedient to talk, the government at least



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recognizes the world stalemate to be beneficial. They must recognize its context also. Ten humanoids with one TC bomb are a trivial way of breaking the stalemate."

"The destruction of fifteen million human beings is scarcely trivial," responded Presidential Assistant Jeffreys.

"Look at the situation from a world power standpoint. A TC detonation would not demoralize us to the point of making us surrender or cripple us in a way that would convince us we could not win over the long term. The ultimate result would just be an annihilating planetary death war that both sides have avoided for so long and so successfully. All *They* would have accomplished is to force us to fight minus one city. Losing one major city is not enough to cripple our intent."

"What do you suggest?" said Jeffreys, coldly. "That *They* do not have ten humanoids in our country? That there is not a TC bomb waiting to get together?"

"I agree that those things are not here for the purpose of inciting a world-devastating war, but perhaps they may be here for some other reason greater than just mid-winter bomb madness," interjected Breckenridge.

"Such as?" asked Jeffreys.

Lynn interjected, "It may be that the physical destruction resulting from the humanoids getting together is not the worst thing that can happen to us. What about the moral and intellectual destruction that comes from their being here at all? With all due respect to Agent Breckenridge, what if *They intended* for us to find out about the humanoids; what if the humanoids are never supposed to get together, but merely remain separate in order to give us something to worry about."

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"Why would they do that? What would be their motivation?" asked Jeffreys.

Lynn answered, "Explain this to me. What measures have already been taken against the humanoids? I suppose that Security is going through the files of all citizens who have ever been across the border or close enough to it to make kidnapping possible. I know that they are following up on suspicious psychiatric cases since Macalaster mentioned it yesterday. But what else are we doing?"

Jeffreys answered saying, "Small X-ray devices are being installed in key places in the large cities. In convention centers and sports arenas, for instance."

"Where ten humanoids might slip in among a hundred thousand spectators in a football game or a soccer match!" said Lynn somewhat sarcastically.

"Exactly," said Jeffreys.

"And concert halls and churches?" asked Lynn.

"We must start somewhere. We can't do it all at once," said Jeffreys.

"Particularly when panic must be avoided," said Lynn. "Isn't that so? It wouldn't fly to have the public realize that at any unpredictable moment, some unpredictable city and its human population would suddenly cease to exist."

"I suppose that's obvious. What are you driving at?" asked Jeffreys.

Lynn said strenuously, "That a growing fraction of our national effort will be diverted entirely into the nasty problem of what Amberley called finding a very small needle in a very large haystack. We'll be madly chasing our tails, while *They* increase their leadership in research to the point where we can no longer

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catch up to them, and when we must surrender without the chance of snapping our fingers in retaliation.

"Consider further that this news will leak out as more and more people become involved in our countermeasures and more and more people begin to guess what we're doing. Then what? The panic might do us more harm than one TC bomb could ever do."

The Presidential Assistant said, irritably, "In Heaven's name, man, what do you suggest we do then?"

"Nothing," said Lynn. "Call their bluff. Live as we have lived and gamble that *They* won't dare break the stalemate for the sake of a one-bomb head start."

"Impossible!" said Jeffreys. "Completely impossible. The welfare of all of *Us* is largely in my hands, and doing nothing is the one thing I cannot do. I agree with you, perhaps, that X-ray machines at convention centers and sports arenas are a kind of shallow, skin-deep measure that won't be effective, but it has to be done so that people, in the aftermath, do not come to the bitter conclusion that we tossed our country away for the sake of a subtle line of reasoning that encouraged do-nothing-ism. In fact, our counter-gambit will indeed be active."

"In what way?" asked Lynn.

Presidential Assistant Jeffreys looked at Breckenridge. The young Security officer, hitherto calmly silent, said, "It's no use talking about a possible future break in the stalemate when the stalemate is now broken. It doesn't matter whether these humanoids explode or not. Maybe the humanoids *are* only bait to divert us, as you say. But the fact remains that we are a quarter of a century behind in robotics, and that may be fatal. What other advances in robotics will there be to surprise us if war does start? The only answer is to divert our entire

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force immediately, I mean *now*, into a crash program of robotics research, and the first problem is to find the humanoids. Call it an exercise in robotics, if you will, or call it the prevention of the death of fifteen million men, women, and children."

Lynn shook his head, helplessly, "You *can't*. You'd be playing into their hands. *They* want us lured into the one blind alley that will consume a vast amount of our resources, while *They* are free to advance in all other directions."

Jeffreys said, impatiently, "That's your guess. Breckenridge has made his suggestion through channels and the government has approved it, and we will begin with an all-Science conference."

"All-Science?" asked Lynn.

Breckenridge answered, "We have listed every important scientist of every branch of natural science. They'll all be at Cheyenne. There is only one point on the agenda: How to advance robotics. The major and very specific sub-heading under that will be: How to develop a receiving device for the electromagnetic fields of the cerebral cortex that will be sufficiently delicate to distinguish between a protoplasmic human brain and a positronic humanoid brain."

"We had hoped you would be willing to be in charge of the conference," said Jeffreys.

"I was not consulted in this," interjected Lynn.

"Obviously time was short, sir. Do you agree to be in charge?" asked Jeffreys.

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Lynn smiled briefly. It was a matter of responsibility again. The responsibility must clearly be that of Robotics. He had the feeling it would be Breckenridge who would really be in charge. But what could he do?

Lynn shrugged his shoulders complacently and said, "I agree."



Breckenridge and Lynn returned together to Cheyenne, where that evening Laszlo listened with a sullen mistrust to Lynn's description of coming events.

Laszlo said, "While you were gone, Chief, I've started putting five experimental models of humanoid structure through the testing procedures. Our men are on a twelve-hour day, with three shifts overlapping. If we've got to arrange a conference, we're going to be crowded and red-taped out of everything. Work will come to a halt."

Breckenridge said, "That will be only temporary. You will gain more than you lose."

Laszlo scowled. "A bunch of astrophysicists and geochemists around won't help toward robotics."

"Views from specialists of other fields may be helpful," said Breckenridge.

"Are you sure? How do we know that there *is* any way of detecting brain waves or that, even if we can, there is a way of differentiating human and humanoid wave patterns? Who set up the project, anyway?" asked Laszlo.

"I did," said Breckenridge.

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"*You* did? Are you a robotics man?"

The young Security agent said, calmly, "I have studied robotics."

"That's not the same thing."

"I've had access to text-material dealing with Russian robotics — in Russian. Top-secret material well in advance of anything you have here."

Lynn said, dolefully, "He has us there, Laszlo."

"It was on the basis of that material," Breckenridge went on, "that I suggested this particular line of investigation. It is reasonably certain that in copying off the electromagnetic pattern of a specific human mind into a specific positronic brain, a perfectly exact duplicate cannot be made. For one thing, the most complicated positronic brain small enough to fit into a human-sized skull is hundreds of times less complex than the human brain. Therefore, it can't pick up all the overtones and there must be some way to take advantage of that fact."

Laszlo looked impressed. Lynn smiled grimly. It was easy to resent Breckenridge and the coming intrusion of several hundred scientists of non-robotics specialties, but the problem itself was an intriguing one. There was that consolation, at least.



It came to him quietly.

Lynn found he had nothing to do but sit in his office alone, with an executive position that had grown merely titular. Perhaps that helped. It gave him time to think, to picture the creative scientists of half the world converging on Cheyenne.

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It was Breckenridge who, with cool efficiency, was handling the details of preparation. There had been a kind of confidence in the way he said, "Let's get together and we'll lick *Them*."

Let's get together.

It came to Lynn so quietly that anyone watching him at that moment might have seen his eyes blink slowly twice — but surely nothing more.

He did what he had to do with a whirling detachment that kept him calm when he felt that, by all rights, he ought to be going mad.

He sought out Breckenridge in his improvised quarters.

Breckenridge was alone and frowning. "Is anything wrong, sir?"

Lynn said, wearily, "Everything's right — I think. I've invoked martial law."

"What!" Breckenridge said in shock.

"As chief of a division, I can do so if I am of the opinion the situation warrants it. Over my division, I can then be the dictator. Chalk up one for the beauties of decentralization."

"You will rescind that order immediately." Breckenridge took a step forward. "When Washington hears this, you will be ruined."

"I'm ruined anyway. Do you think I don't realize that I've been set up for the role of the greatest villain in American history: the man who let *Them* break the stalemate? I have nothing to lose — and perhaps a great deal to gain."

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He laughed wildly, "What a target the Division of Robotics will be, eh, Breckenridge? Only a few thousand men were to be killed by a TC bomb capable of wiping out three hundred square miles in one micro-second. But bombing Cheyenne, five hundred of those men would be our greatest scientists. We would be in the peculiar position of having to fight a war with our brains shot out or surrendering. I think we'd surrender."

"But this is impossible. Lynn, do you hear me? Do you understand? How could the humanoids pass our security provisions? How could they get together?" frantically asked Breckenridge.

"But they *are* getting together! We're helping them to do so. We're ordering them to do so. Our scientists visit the other side, Breckenridge. They visit *Them* regularly. You made a point of how strange it was that no one in robotics did. Well, ten of those scientists are still there, and in their place, ten humanoids are converging on Cheyenne."

"That's a ridiculous guess," said Breckenridge still taken back.

"I think it's a good one, Breckenridge. But it wouldn't work unless we knew humanoids were in America so we would call the conference in the first place. Quite a set of coincidences you set in motion. The coincidence that you brought the news of the humanoids *and then* suggested the conference *and then* suggested the agenda *and then once again* are running the show *and, this is the kicker*, know exactly which scientists to invite to make sure the right ten were included."

"Dr. Lynn!" cried Breckenridge in outrage. He poised to rush forward.

Lynn said, "Don't move. I've got a blaster here. We'll just wait for the scientists to get here one by one. One by one we'll X-ray them. One by one, we'll



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monitor them for radioactivity. No two will get together without being checked, and if all five hundred are clear, I'll give you my blaster and surrender to you. Only I think we'll find the ten humanoids. Sit down, Breckenridge."

They both sat.

Lynn said, "We'll wait. When I'm tired, Laszlo will take over for me, but for now, we'll just patiently wait."



Professor Manuel Jiminez of the Institute of Higher Studies of Buenos Aires exploded while the stratospheric jet on which he traveled was three miles above the Amazon Valley. It was a simple chemical explosion, but it was enough to destroy the plane.

Dr. Herman Liebowitz of M. I. T. exploded in a monorail, killing twenty people and injuring a hundred others.

In a similar manner, Dr. Auguste Marin of The Nuclear Institute<sup>1</sup> of Montreal and seven others died at various stages on their journey to Cheyenne.

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<sup>1</sup> L'Institut Nucléonique

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Laszlo hurtled in, pale-faced and stammering, with the first news of it. It had only been two hours that Lynn had sat there facing Breckenridge with a blaster in hand.

Laszlo said, "I thought you were nuts, Chief, but you were right. *They were* humanoids. *They had* to be." He turned to stare with hate-filled eyes at Breckenridge. "Only they were warned. *He* warned them, and now there won't be one left intact. Not one to study."

"God!" cried Lynn and in a frenzy of haste thrust his blaster out toward Breckenridge and fired. The Security man's neck vanished; the torso fell; the head dropped, thudded against the floor, and rolled crookedly away.

Lynn moaned, "I didn't understand, I thought he was a traitor. Nothing more."

Laszlo stood immobile, mouth open, for the moment incapable of speech.

Lynn said wildly, "Sure, he warned them. But how could he do so while sitting in that chair unless he were equipped with built-in radio transmission? Don't you see it? Breckenridge had been in Moscow. The real Breckenridge is still there. Oh my God, there were *eleven* of them."

Laszlo managed a hoarse squeak. "Why didn't *he* explode?"

"He was hanging on, I suppose, to make sure the others had received his message and were safely destroyed. When you brought the news and I realized the truth, I couldn't shoot fast enough. I most likely beat him to it by only a few seconds."

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Laszlo said, shakingly, "At least, we'll have one to study." He bent and put his fingers on the sticky fluid trickling out of the mangled remains at the neck end of the headless body.

Not blood, but high-grade machine oil.

**THE END**