

The Genesis Complex By Lauren Cole

Nealson sputtered like a car that wouldn't start. "But, but, but sir! You aren't honestly? I mean, you wouldn't really? I mean, you aren't serious, are you?"

Doctor Mobius Hathcock failed to lift his eyes from the screen before him, easily tried by such mindless queries. Nonetheless, he returned, in a tone reflective of his withering patience, "Shouldn't I be?" As one of his hands massaged his neatly shorn chin, the other traced carelessly, but methodically, across the control panel at which he sat, concentrating. Glued to those fingers, Nealson's eyes widened. "But, but you *can't!*" Another exhaustive comment on the part of Nealson.

"Certainly I *can*, Nealson, and remarkably easily, if I might add. Why, with a mere push of this button." His fingertips grazed the smooth, red protrusion, the very action of which caused Nealson to wince beneath his lab coat. A glance across the room to the small porthole view of Earth briefly restored an elusive confidence. "Ability or not, Doctor Hathcock! What gives you the right?" Hathcock withdrew his hand from the console, utilizing it in the momentary need for gesture. "The right? The right??" he flailed, agitatedly. "It is that very ability which grants me the right! As the creator of the technology, I am entitled to use it, and as it has been created, why, I am inexorably *obligated* to put it to use, bound by the very legacy of human development."

"Obligation!" Nealson cried, matching Dr. Hathcock's gesticulations with his own, albeit adding a certain pitch (it was Mobius's turn to wince), "You think that just because someone stumbles across something new, that its exploration is automatically justified? Even at the expense of others? Science was meant to be an avenue for helping the whole of humanity, not for letting every jerk with a test tube give in to such corruptive self-indulgence!" The lowly assistant swallowed his gall sharply; Hathcock didn't miss a beat.

"That's where you're wrong, Nealson. Don't direct your accusing eyes to the scientists. The heart of every man hungers for propulsion forward. What of your Humanity? Once they got their hands on atomic energy, they had to test the extent of its power. The reversal of aging? Half of those who look forty are upwards of one hundred years old. Advances in human genetics? Society wouldn't have stood for hoarding that

kind of potential, begged for us to push its limits. And for a while there we had a whole generation of blond-hair blue-eyes who played lacrosse and were veritable whizzes at the cello, your cookie-cutter virtuoso, hot off the press, remember that?” Doctor Mobius had gotten so close that Nealson could feel the heat of his breath.

An embittered murmur, “Well, maybe there are some powers that one simply isn’t meant to wield.”

Doctor Hathcock pounded his fist against the control panel, consequently close to that dreaded button, “Think about it, will you?! You’re swatting blindly for fault like a damned piñata! The masses are brainless, dangerously so; it is but the one that matters!” Nealson threw up his hands as the doctor continued without interruption. “You are suggesting that even though the technology is mine, created by me and controlled by me alone, even though I hold the capability in my very hands and have more than ample cause to follow through, that I mustn’t because it isn’t my what, my place? Well, goodness, Nealson! If not my place, then whose? Yours?”

Nealson smoldered, fists clenched in timid frustration. “No! Not mine, not yours, not any man’s. Others have defied Nature before, but you’re trying outright to play God, that’s what you’re trying to do!”

“Ah, but Nealson,” Mobius smiled patiently, subdued, “it was Man that created God, not the other way around.”

“But you are attempting to elevate yourself to godliness, are you not? One god was not the creator, but one man shall be the destroyer? Is that it?” The words echoed across the cold metal of the chamber, through its plated walls, and out into the even colder expanse beyond.

Mobius sighed. “Oh, for goodness’s sake, Nealson. I am not out to destroy mankind; they’re doing a good enough job of that, themselves. One could say I am prepared to do quite the opposite. Not wipe them out, but give them a second chance. For hundreds upon hundreds of years humankind has struggled against its own power. I have known how it thirsted for boundaries that it could break, reveling in its own glory, compounded by a radiance that only grew brighter with each milestone that it surpassed. But somewhere along, allowed to run unchecked, it lost its way, Nealson. And I have watched with my own eyes as the human race selected myopia, ignored the fading of its

luminescence into mere illusion, bloated from pride into a rotten mess, and prepared for implosion, all the while glazed over in layer upon layer of excuses.” Hathcock’s eyes glistened for the past, and glowed for the future.

Nealson’s eyes, on the other hand, had long fixed upon the view of the earth, finding comfort in the beauty he had always found in looking at one’s planet from near space. His voice observed a strange passivity. “Well, perhaps that was God’s plan, did you ever think of that?”

Hathcock shook his head and returned to his place at the helm of the broad control panel and the red button it bore. “Suppose so, Nealson. So what? If some deity finds some entertainment in this, some method, some plan, then what? I remain abhorrent of such a course of existence, and with the power to change it, I can take the matter into my own hands. Cognizance demands it. As a member of the human race, I simply cannot sit back and watch it happen. No punishment awaits me. I shall say it again. God is nothing more than an invention of the ever impressive human will—another excuse for that which we feel we cannot face ourselves.”

Nealson lingered in the back of the chamber, still as a statue. “How can you be so self-righteous, so confident of your cause? I mean, the cost we’re talking about! You’re prepared to wipe out the entire history of human civilization, of all that it has meant, all that it has accomplished.”

“Accomplishment!” Mobius spat, “All that humanity has been accomplishing for the past four thousand years and beyond are different ways to wreak misery—mindless wars, poisonous toxins, lethal weapons, paralyzing hatred, ...”

Nealson did not argue, but neither did he concede. “Alright, then what of human nature?”

Doctor Hathcock turned his head ever so slightly. “What of it?”

“You know, human nature—that which cannot be overridden. You are so sure that once you, you activate your device and you, you reduce humanity back to the roots of its current evolution, that you will be able to divert it along a different path more aligned with your principles?”

“Certainly,” Doctor Mobius Hathcock contended, assuming once more his stance of confidence and again donning his dashing meglomaniactal grin. “Under my

enlightened leadership Earth will be restored to its greatest potential. There will be no more murder, no more pollution, no more mindless destruction. Under my tireless care, there will be no corruptive element allowed to sour a future that we can really be proud of. Oh, to finally be able to call ourselves civilized beings!”

As the Doctor continued to gush wildly, Neelson only stood back and quietly shook his head.

And, as echoes of “Unmatched glory!” and the way “things will be different this time!” filled the bowels of the small spacecraft that orbited the earth, Doctor Mobius Hathcock pushed the big red button.

And, one hundred and twelve years later, to the good doctor’s chagrin (and with no less than a smirk from Neelson), he pushed it again.