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Book Review

Name of Book:        Nemesis

Author:        Isaac Asimov was born in 1920 in Petrovichi, Russia. When he was three years of age, his family immigrated to the United States and settled in Brooklyn, New York. Asimov turned to full time writing in 1958. This accomplished writer is best known for his novels dealing with science fiction. However, his works extend to other subjects. These include humour, mystery, history, and some volumes involving the Bible and Shakespeare. He has published around 500 books for both young and adult readers. His most famous science-fiction writings are I, Robot (1950) and The Foundation Trilogy (1951-1953). Asimov was dubbed a Grand Master of Science Fiction in 1987 by the Science Fiction Writers of America. He died in 1992.

Setting:        The story takes place in two time periods. One set of events takes place in the present, while the other set takes place in the past, drawing closer to the present. It spans over a fifteen year period, beginning in the year 2220. Although most of the important incidents occur on the planet Erythro about 2 light years from our solar system, the novel shifts between Earth, space, and the Settlement named Rotor, which orbits the foreign planet.

Main Character:

Marlene Fisher is a very intelligent young woman at fifteen years of age. As a child, all who encountered her sensed that she was different. Her wide eyes absorbed all that was around her and seemed to know a great deal. Growing older, her "uniqueness" established itself as a gift in which she is able to read into the body language of others. A slight movement, a stuttered word, the smallest hesitation gives her indication as to one's true feelings and motives. Some mistake this gift as her being a "psychic", but she is not. Marlene has only learned how to interpret little signs often overlooked.

Now a young woman, Marlene's uncanny ability has become quite developed. She finds herself constantly watching people's reactions, and does not hesitate to bluntly speak out what she has learned. Her intuitions sometimes get too interfering and she often crosses the line of being helpful. Many become extremely uncomfortable whenever in her presence, so she is advised by her mother against showing this talent. She tries to follow her mother's warning and her annoyance at the falseness of those surrounding her dwindles.

Although Marlene is obviously an exceptional youth, she has troubles and stresses just like any other teenage girl. She knows she is rather plain looking and senses that others agree, but she has come to accept this fact. In her unrequited love for Aurinel, Marlene is perplexed that her intelligence, which should outshine beauty, does not. However, as time passes and life becomes more complicated, she soon buries these feelings.

Marlene knows that she can use her talent to her own advantage and does. When on Rotor, she yearns to be on Erythro, not knowing why but making a firm resolution to do everything in her power to make her desire reality. She confronts the Commissioner of Rotor about his dislike for her and her mother, thereby accomplishing Marlene's goal of being transferred to the nearby planet. Bathed in red light from the star Nemesis, she is more at ease with herself on Erythro.

A mysterious illness plagues the planet, especially those of higher intelligence. Though many fear for Marlene's health, she is extremely confident that she will not be harmed. Her stubbornness prevents her from giving in to the advice of others, and she ventures forth into the planet's natural environment. Meeting with a being of like intellect, her mind is able to further expand.

Her new friend, indigenous to Erythro, assists Marlene in using her mind to communicate with it. Her outings become an almost daily event and, as a result of her confidences with this alien, she matures. She now understands why people do not always reveal their true feelings and why they keep things to themselves. She learns the importance of privacy and has come to terms with her father's desertion of her. She is now seen as a true adult in the eyes of those around her.

Theme:

Nemesis was the Greek Goddess of Retribution, of Justified Revenge, and of Punishment. In Isaac Asimov's *Nemesis*, an idea of the theme can be derived from the title itself. Although it sometimes appears to make changes for the better, mankind is essentially a self-destructing species which destroys others along with itself. This theme of human nature and its inability in dealing with its problems is evident throughout the course of events. Demonstrated in seeing Earth in the future, which is unable to contend with difficulties despite all its advancements, Asimov voices his opinion.

Initially, the future is portrayed as a wonderful world because of its many technologies. Science has prolonged life, "Settlements" have left Earth to orbit in nearby space, and occurrences of space travel have increased. However, this picture of peacefulness soon begins to disintegrate.

In pre-Settlement times, Earth appears to have completely abolished all prejudices based on outward appearances. Slang terms for the different races have not been used for two centuries, of which Earth is quite proud. After years of struggling to live in peace, with all backgrounds and all features, it has much improved over the previous hateful times. Nevertheless, as soon as space travel allows for groups of people to move out into space, this illusion of total harmony fades.

Settlements are now quite common as there are hundreds floating around in near space. Visitors to other Settlements notice the differences between each and the uniformity within every small establishment. As observed by Earth's Director:

Like clings to like, because like hates and despises unlike.

Most have adopted a racial unity and those of different ethnicity are made to feel an inconvenience. The reason for this suspicion of one another lies in Earth's wild mixture of cultures. Earthmen are proud of this characteristic and consider it to be a strong point. Then why hate Settlements for having what Earth would consider a disadvantage? It is fearful that this racial unity will prove successful. This development of a dislike between Settlements themselves and between Earth leads to competition in outdoing one another.

As faster space travel techniques are established, one particular Settlement, Rotor, moves away to a newly found star named Nemesis. Despite their knowledge of the danger it poses to Earth, the Commissioner does not warn others of the potential loss of lives. Rather, he keeps this information to himself, hoping his Settlement will be the last seed from which all other life will begin anew. In anticipation for the arrival of representatives from Earth, he installs locating devices to warn him, and at their signal will blast them out of space.

Earth develops a more advanced superluminal flight, thus enabling travel at the speed of light. Its destruction is inevitable so it is decided that Erythro will be taken over, to serve as a temporary rescue location before it is possible for the population to disperse into outer space.

Regardless of the Commissioner's hate for these people, he is perceptible in that he sees the fate of humankind far into the future. In order for civilizations to be successful,

Humanity needs space, size, variety, a horizon, a frontier.

This is the rationalization provided by Earth for expanding into the outer regions of space, beyond the Solar System. In spite of this given reason, mankind cannot be expected to live a virtuous life when it was not even able to handle its problems when on Earth. What more if this problem is allowed to spread out?

The same anarchy, the same degeneration, the same

short-term thinking, all the same cultural and social disparities would continue to prevail--Galaxywide. All vices will be allowed to grow and overflow into other worlds. The complications of the human race will multiply. Sense will never be made out of all the confusion.

"Nemesis had indeed come."

Endnotes

Isaac Asimov, *Nemesis* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1989), 11.

"ibid." 102.

"ibid." 249.

"ibid." 385.

"ibid." 386.