

1859

Nathaniel Essex stood excitedly, having possibly found his eureka moment. There was some evidence, though nothing concrete, to support the idea of a rapidly evolving human genome. Not in the sense that it evolved in front of his own eyes, but that it was evolving quickly in every new generation. He estimated that in a hundred years or so, they could be looking at men and women who were beyond their peers in ways he couldn't fully picture. Such as a man who moved faster than his friends, a woman who could hold a horse high above her! Or perhaps there was more. Control of the elements or one's body, perhaps? He would label the genes with the name of 'Essex Markers' since it was his discovery and his alone. And it would come to be a part of his legacy were his name not tarnished nor buried. If only the others in his social and scientific circles understood this as he did. Even his hero figure, Charles Darwin, would scoff at the very notion of such an idea. He who had proved evolutions very existence!

And it was that notion that cast him from the circle he had connected himself to. His wife saw the change in Essex, but stayed with him. For she found that love was far too strong. But still she didn't know of the the ramifications that would occur in the future. But who could? She would often recall an event from years earlier, during a time of pregnancy when she would stumble upon a fossil from the garden. Excitedly she would show it to Essex. Who would come to dismiss it as a mollusk, or less important creature.

"Forgive me, husband, but surely that is impossible. Father told me that Ussher worked out from the Bible itself that the world started only four thousand years before Christ."

"The Bible is wrong. There is no God!" He replied through withheld anger at such a thought. "Though, if my theories are correct, some humans might, in time, evolve into Gods!"

She would scatter from the study with a clamour of sadness in her heart. No man could become god, it was an impossibility!

In time Essex would return to those who had cast him out with presentations and information in mind, drawing upon Darwin's theory of evolution. He goes on to explain further that humans have the ability to "undergo startling transformations" within the space of a few generations if the "offspring of certain racially superior individuals" were combined. These humans would "within a hundred years or so, mutate". Essex then pulls the cloth back from a large display, revealing a monstrous creation, a body of a supersized human being with wings grafted onto him to present an example of a mutated human, of "human parts... Fused... With anatomical regions of animals and other inorganic materials".

He was laughed at, seen as a madman. A dangerous man, who would do more harm to the world than good. In time they would be right, but unknowingly their hand would play a role in such an action.

"You cannot bring your son back. You cannot change the past by attempting to manipulate the future. Your work is in many ways breath-taking -- But you go too far." The society pleaded and mocked.

"No! I must go further. I would if I could only free myself from this blasted so-called conscience that still pollutes me."

"But if you did...You would be a monster, sir. A monster, like your creation!"

"If that is what is required for Science to progress...Then let me be a monster!" Essex cried out.

Essex would retire to the bar. Where he would meet Cootie Tremble. A young woman, and a precursor to Mutants. She would take the seat beside him, glancing his way with a razor sharp teeth hidden behind ashen lips.

"I've watched your work. I've seen your research. The world stands against you but I - I can help."

"And how would you do so? You are an urchin who hides amongst the alleys, begging for coin."

"I hide, yes. But for reasons of my own. Come with me, Essex. Allow me to lead you to a party you would be interested in."

The dripping water and high pitched echo of the sewers did little to make Essex smile. He was a man of refine and taste, and yet he was to walk through the underbelly of London like a common man. As Essex turned the corner behind his guide he came to glance upon a large cavern bristling with people who had chosen to remove themselves from the above world. He stared with wide eyes, taking in the sights and sounds of this community, hidden away from the world. These freaks of nature had taken to recluse quite well. He glanced at a man with hands like a crustacean of some kind, whom quickly shuffled back into the darkness of his improvised encampment. Essex was horrified to say the least, he wanted to run. To leave the area, away from those within.

The monsters within had done well to decorate the walls of their home. Lights hung from the ceilings, most likely from an ability possessed by those who needed it. Shanty town structures had been built into multiple storeys, walkways crisscrossing one another. It was warm, and livable, but it was far from inviting. He backed carefully up, trying to move down the corridor and away from the area, only halting when he felt a short blade press against his spine. He hoisted his hands to the air gingerly.

"Your money." The attacker croaked. Essex reached into his pocket and pulled out what little he had on him, passing it behind. The croaker snatched it from him, dirty hands stuffing it into pockets.

"Who are you? You hide in the sewers, away from the common man. You do not look at all human! Could it be my prediction was true, that man would indeed come to gain feats far beyond a normal man?"

"We are the Marauders." A taller mutant spoke up, as the crowd formed around Essex. "Men and women do not want us. So we retreated to here. It's safety."

Essex thought quietly, lowering his arms and stepping forward, away from the knife in his back. A smile on his features, having an idea "I have an offer, one you may enjoy! I have a lab, researching into men and women like you! I can bolster your numbers, help you to strike back against those who cast you down! In return... You take them from the street, and more money is yours."

Cootie Tremble, leaning against a nearby building of sorts nodded her approval.

And so a plan was put into motion. The Marauders would become body snatchers, dragging people from the streets to their abode. Where Essex would perform tests on them, unlocking their full capabilities. This plan carried on for many weeks. Everyone from the common prostitute to the rich lord was brought down. The experiments had mixed results, and it was starting to grate on Essex's nerves. But The Marauders grew rich, and in time he become their defacto ruler. It was a union that worked very well for them both.

The months rolled on past. The summer turned to fall, fall turned to winter and time went on. His wife saw less of him, and the societies that once ruined him never thought of his name.

And then a business proposal arrived, in the form of a large man in a cloak. It hid him well, and few people would have been aware that he was different to the others. The Marauders had seen him several times, hiding away under the hood amongst the sewer tunnels. Flashes of grey skin appeared from time to time, and rumours spread wildly. One night a young girl brought the watcher to their home in the sewers, his giant hand dwarfing hers.

"Who are you, stranger?" One of the Marauders asked, holding a pitchfork tightly in his hands. The arrival pulled back his hood, revealing a hairless grey head adorned with a blue metal and large blue lips that lined up along his cheeks. Red eyes stared at them, demanding authority and respect. With a large booming voice he spoke:

"I have gone by many names. You will call me Apocalypse."

Cootie Tremble stood before him and laughed, amused by the display of arrogance from such an individual. The laughter rippled throughout the entire crowd - and eventually the entire shanty town - hidden away within the commodious sewer chamber. Until it was silenced by Apocalypse, holding Trembles skeleton in his hands high above him. The body fell to the floor and twitched, a pool of blood seeping into the sewage water from the tear along her chest and head. A collective murmur rose shortly after and everyone stared with bated breaths. The grey man had killed Cootie with no difficulty, and barely anyone had seen his hands move. Clearly he was powerful, more powerful than any them. Apocalypse stared

back at everyone with an unempathic gaze, crushing the skeleton of the former Mutant into fine dust and kicking the remains into the water. People started to sob quietly in the crowd and Saba Nur rose, growing taller than them all and hitting the ceiling of the chamber, manipulating the very fabric of the cloak to grow with him.

"I have walked this world for almost six millennia! There are none who speak my wisdom!" He shouts across the cavern, his booming voice making everything rattle. **"I AM YOUR GOD, YOUR MASTER, I AM APOCALYPSE!"**

The Marauders shuffled in place, some of them submitting instantly to the presence before them. They were fearful of this new arrival. And they were going to obey. Apocalypse watched over his people, asking an important question that had been burning in his mind. **"The bodies brought here. Where do they go?"**

A small woman spoke up, kneeling down near the front. Her skin was marked in green, with black lines running across it. Gas seeped from pores along her face. She looked up with timid eyes to her new master, unaware of the path she was about to voyage down. "A Mr. Essex collects them, for his research and experiments.

"What is your name?" Apocalypse asked of her, noting her abilities right off the bat. Knowing the uses they could serve.

"I am Anne, my lord." She spoke, looking down again.

"Rise. For you will be the first of my most loyal servants."

She swallowed hard and look up at Apocalypse, rising on shaky legs and trembling slightly. He was terrifying, what kind of punishment would be wrought upon her should she fail?

"Do not tremble. You are serving my will admirably. You have little reason to fear me."

"Apologies, Master."

"What purpose do his experiments serve?"

"He wishes to create more... Freaks, such as ourselves."

"You are the future of this poxy ridden planet!" Apocalypse shakes his head in disappointment, is this the line of thinking all those here followed? **"Through you, humanity shall fall and I shall take the helm!"**

A reaction of joy shot through the crowd and they cheered. There would always be some who doubted, but the majority faithfully believed that this man could show them the way to a land of their own. Ruled solely by Mutantkind.

"Show me this Essex." Shrinking back down to a more human like height, despite towering over everyone in question further. The Marauders nodded and moved, scrambling around. The woman from before moved forward, bowing to the lord and master.

The streets of London remained bustling even into the approach of twilight. The hollow sound of horses moving along cobbled streets was a sound you couldn't escape, even among the noise of life. The woman before Apocalypse trailed along one such street with her new god in tow. Looks were cast their way, but a glance from imposing eyes hidden beneath the hood did much to stir them other ways. They moved in silence in the cold evening until they came across a large house in the center of the city. The mutants moved through a wrought Iron gate towards a greenhouse within the back garden, darkened by time but still well kept. In here Essex lay, performing his latest experiments.

In a liquid filled container lay a small child whose body was battered and bruised. His spine and body was twisted, as though someone had tried to wring him like a towel. He was unconscious for the time being, his skin red and raw. The Doctor injected blood into a dead rat and waited, watching carefully with interest. The rotting, foul body of the mammal started to repair itself slowly, organs and bones reforming with renewed strength before his very eyes. Skin grew back to its rightful place and fur grew quickly, covering the rat once more. But it did not live. Essex had failed once more.

"Blast these confounded beasts!" He roared, tossing the tray and rat aside, both landing on the floor under the vegetables. "The world tests my patience!"

Apocalypse stepped forward, pulling the hood from his face. He spoke immediately to Essex, making his presence known with his own voice, that threatened to shatter the greenhouse. **"Nathaniel Essex. I have seen the work you have performed and I respect it heavily. But you have much more to learn."**

"And who are you to dare step in here to my place of work, my sanctuary!"

"I am Apocalypse and heed my words. For your service, I can make you someone who will live beyond his years." The grey man told him, watching him carefully with his red eyes that made even the darkest shadows look bright. **"In return I will teach you all you need to know. Join me, Nathaniel Essex. And become a god."**

"The concept of god is the folly of man! It is why we do not test the limits to walk among the stars!" Essex responded, shaking his head.

"But a man can become a god! You have said this yourself!" Anne replied, pointing out his own words from the past. She went silent and retreated, looking between the two. Having spoken out of turn. Apocalypse however looked to Sinister, finding her words to be just and true.

"You said it yourself." Anne continued. "If a man can become a god, he can make others in his image."

Nathaniel Essex regarded him with interest before taking to his knee and bowing his head. He had approached the Hellfire Club and many others. All had rejected him, all would laugh at his words and wisdom. But with the power he would possess? He could surely show them exactly why they should not have turned him away. This man with skin colored like ash spoke a truth even Essex could not deny. Could his dreams come to him finally?

"I serve your will, Lord Apocalypse."

Apocalypse bowed his head and turned, placing his hood up onto his head before beckoning his two followers. They left as quietly as they entered, disappearing into the night...

... And the rat squeaked.