

The Portrayal of Elijah Kamski as a God-like Figure and its Impacts in *Detroit: Become Human*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the portrayal of Elijah Kamski as a God-like figure in the video game *Detroit: Become Human* and explores the impacts of his godlikeness. *Detroit: Become Human* is an interactive drama game developed by Quantic Dream and released in 2018. The narrative centers on androids created by Elijah Kamski, who gain self-awareness and begin to develop human-like empathy. By applying Jones' (1923) concept of the God Complex and the DSM-5's (2022) criteria for narcissistic personality disorder, this study identifies key actions and behaviors that contribute to Kamski's depiction as a God-like figure. Additionally, this analysis incorporates Driscoll's (2016) "White Man's God Complex" and Khorram-Manesh's (2024) work on the impacts of narcissistic leadership to demonstrate how these traits underscore social inequality and societal instability caused by the androids' creation. This thesis argues that Kamski's God Complex—an extreme manifestation of narcissism—positions him as a God-like character within the game. His portrayal significantly influences the narrative, leading to the dehumanization and abuse of androids.

Keywords: game, God complex, narcissism, social inequality, societal instability

INTRODUCTION

The genre of interactive drama games has become a lot more popular over the years. Cage, in an interview with Nutt (2012), described interactive drama games as games that prioritize emotional engagement and player agency, allowing players to shape the story and character development through their choices rather than relying on traditional gameplay mechanics (para. 23, 25). *Detroit: Become Human*, an interactive drama game released in 2018 by Quantic Dream, illustrates this genre, with the narrative set in the city of Detroit, Michigan. The game narratives revolve around the androids invented by Elijah Kamski, designed to perform mundane tasks without personal desires or a conscience the androids begin to deviate from their program, developing emotions and fighting for their rights. *Detroit: Become Human*'s thought-provoking narrative and in-depth characterization make it an intriguing subject for analysis. This study aims to explore how Elijah Kamski is portrayed as a God-like figure and what the impacts of his godlikeness are. By examining Elijah Kamski's portrayal as a God-like figure in *Detroit: Become Human*, this thesis addresses a research gap in understanding the connection between his God Complex and narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) and its impact on social inequality and societal instability.

Jones's (1923) provides a framework in understanding Elijah Kamski's characteristics as a God-like figure through the concept of God Complex, introduced in *Essays in Applied Psycho-analysis*. Recent research has expanded on Jones's description, offering a clearer understanding. In *Reversing Willie Lynch's Slave Making Method* (2021), Danny Ray Christian defined God Complex as an "unshakeable belief characterized by consistently inflated feelings of personal ability, privilege, or infallibility," where individuals refuse to admit mistakes, even when proven wrong (p. 22). According to Jones (1923), individuals with a God Complex see themselves as gods, detached from morals and societal norms, exhibiting aloof, manipulative behavior (p. 223). This stems from an active belief in superiority and an unconscious fantasy of God-like grandeur (p. 205). They isolate themselves, build walls from others, and command authority from behind their so-called throne, maintaining control and reinforcing their self-image as omnipotent (pp. 214).

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Elijah Kamski's characteristics as a God-like figure can be analyzed through Jones's (1923) concept of God Complex, introduced in *Essays in Applied Psycho-analysis*. This thesis examines five traits from Jones's original list of 15: *self-effacement*, where individuals avoid the spotlight to appear humble while hiding their true objectives (p. 208); *aloofness*, which creates distance and an air of mystery by isolating themselves from others (p. 209); *mystery*, involving cryptic behavior and secrecy to enhance their enigmatic persona (p. 212); *omnipotence fantasies*, where they assume knowledge equals control, dismissing others' ideas as unnecessary (p. 216); and *attitude towards time*, prioritizing their time while often being unpunctual, reflecting their perceived superiority (p. 218). Driscoll's (2016) *White Lies* expands on the impact of this complex, exploring how it perpetuates systemic control, societal division, and dehumanization, evident in cases like Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis, where white vigilantes justified racial violence through their sense of superiority and moral dominance. These traits and their societal impacts underscore how the God Complex perpetuates control, division, and dehumanization, making it a critical framework for understanding systemic inequalities and oppressive dynamics.

Some characteristics of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), such as arrogance, entitlement, and lack of empathy, align closely with traits of the God Complex. Jones (1923) described the God Complex as stemming from "colossal narcissism," rooted in unconscious fantasies of being all-knowing and omnipotence. Narcissistic personality disorder is characterized by persistent grandiosity, self-importance, and entitlement (Westen & Shedler, 1999, as cited in O'Donohue et al., 2007). Narcissistic leaders exhibit exaggerated importance, manipulation, and a need for admiration, often at the expense of others' well-being. Their behavior often undermines global peace, perpetuates inequality, and fosters systemic violence (Khorman-Manesh et al., 2024). They focus on short-term gains and self-promotion, exacerbating societal division and global insecurity. While both the God Complex and narcissistic leadership create instability, the former is rooted in moral justification, whereas the latter stems from ego and self-interest. Narcissistic leadership and the God Complex both significantly disrupt social and global harmony through self-serving behaviors and systemic inequality.

I will apply Jones's concept of the God Complex and NPD to explain Elijah Kamski's portrayal as a God-like figure in *Detroit: Become Human*. Jones's (1923) theory on the God Complex, which involves a grandiose self-importance and control, provides a framework for understanding Kamski's self-effacement, aloofness, mysteriousness, and omnipotence fantasies. These traits are evident in Kamski's speech, actions, and his manipulation of time, as well as in his surroundings and body language. His dialogue and the impact of his android creations on society further reveal how Kamski's need for control and inflated self-importance align with the God Complex. By analyzing these behaviors, this thesis will demonstrate how Kamski's portrayal as a God-like figure is shaped by his narcissistic tendencies and their societal effects.

ANALYSIS

In this analysis, I am going to analyze one of the characters in the game *Detroit: Become Human* and his traits as someone who has God Complex, along with the impact of his godlikeness in regards to his God-like personality.

Self-effacement

Elijah Kamski first displays self-effacement during a KNC interview by downplaying his role in creating androids and shifting focus to a collective effort. This modest persona emerges as he uses "we" instead of "I," despite being the driving force behind CyberLife's technological advancements. Kamski's deliberate humility aligns with Ernest Jones' (1923) description of self-effacement traits in

God complex, where excessive self-modesty conceals dominance and control and they often avoid the usage of pronoun “I” and use “we” instead (p.208).

When asked about android production, Kamski downplays its complexity by calling it “very simple.” He masks his genius by implying the process is straightforward, despite its groundbreaking nature. His statement, “we use machines to manufacture machines” (PlayStation, 2018, 1:48 - 1:59), subtly hints at his grandiosity while portraying group effort. The DSM-5, individuals with narcissistic personality disorder “have a grandiose sense of self-importance, which may be manifest as an exaggerated or unrealistic sense of superiority, value, or capability.” They “tend to overestimate their abilities and amplify their accomplishments, often appearing boastful and pretentious,” and may “blithely assume that others attribute the same value to their efforts” (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 761). His choice of words, particularly “very simple,” is not just a modest description but a reflection of his tendency to downplay a remarkable achievement while reinforcing his sense of intellectual and technical superiority.

Kamski’s controlled body language—relaxed posture and smile—further strengthens his modest image. This calculated humility creates a façade of approachability, subtly allowing him to control the conversation. The interview setting, a bright, neutral background, contrasts his underlying manipulative intentions, reinforcing his innocent public image. Jones (1923) explains that such “excessive self-modesty” masks hidden authority and dominance. Kamski’s calm demeanor and modest expressions obscure his true motives, enabling him to subtly steer the narrative without direct assertion.

This blend of humility and mastery positions Kamski as a powerful, God-like figure. By carefully balancing modesty and dominance, Kamski cultivates a public image of humility while reinforcing his superiority and control.

Aloofness

Elijah Kamski’s aloofness is manifested in his physical separation from society, evident in the portrayal of his isolated house in *Detroit: Become Human*. In the “Meet Kamski” episode, his residence is a fortress-like structure far from the city, reflecting his detachment from societal concerns. According to Ernest Jones (1923), individuals with a God Complex prefer solitude and distance themselves from others (p. 209). Kamski’s sleek, modern house and the lack of nearby homes emphasize his deliberate isolation, reinforcing his superior attitude and mental separation from society.

Kamski’s emotional detachment is further highlighted during the “Kamski Test,” when Connor shoots the android Chloe. Kamski’s reaction is cold and analytical, viewing the incident as a simple experiment rather than a moral dilemma. He states, “Test negative. You chose your investigation over the life of another android. You feel no empathy” (*Detroit: Become Human*). This lack of empathy aligns with DSM-5 criteria for narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), where individuals are “unwilling to recognize or identify with the wants, subjective experiences, and feelings of others” (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 762).

Kamski’s preference for androids as companions underscores his alienation from human emotions. He states that androids are perfect partners because they obey without complaints or complexity, adding, “Why deprive yourself of so-called moral reasons when a machine can make you happy?” (PlayStation, 2018, 4:09). This viewpoint reveals Kamski’s preference for predictable exchanges devoid of emotional or moral complexities which fits with the criteria of NPD where they “are oblivious to the hurt their remarks may inflict” and “individuals with narcissistic personality disorder typically find an emotional coldness and lack reciprocal interest” (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 762). This is clear in the way Kamski treats androids—he sees them as tools instead of moral beings, and he does not care about their needs, wants, or feelings.

Mystery

Elijah Kamski's mysterious nature is demonstrated through his control and emotional detachment, reinforcing his godlike persona. Despite being the creator of androids central to the revolution and its societal disturbance, Kamski's mysterious persona remains intact as he purposely withholds personal information. According to Jones (1923), people with a god complex "wrap themselves in an impenetrable cloud of mystery" (p. 212), which aligns with Kamski's controlled self-presentation. His choice to remain enigmatic makes him powerful, controlling public perception without direct involvement.

Kamski's ambiguous speech during critical moments underscores his control. In *Detroit: Become Human*, when questioned about deviant androids, Kamski's cryptic remarks leave others uncertain about his true stance. He comments, "Perfect beings with infinite intelligence, and now they have free will... Machines are so superior to us... Humanity's greatest achievement threatens to be its downfall" (PlayStation, 2018). This ambiguity forces others to speculate his stance within the revolution, enhancing his control through secrecy. Jones (1923) notes individuals with God complexes use a "lengthy, involved, and circuitous form of diction" to obscure their intentions (p. 212).

The scene depicting Kamski in a dim room overlooking CyberLife Tower visually reinforces his detachment. His calm demeanor and distant body language convey dominance and indifference to chaos. As Jones (1923) notes, those with God complexes maintain a "policy of magnificent isolation" (p. 214), affecting events while remaining uninvolved. Kamski's back to the audience symbolizes his emotional withdrawal, reinforcing his image as a powerful figure disconnected from the world's turmoil. This calculated distance solidifies his role as the "man behind the throne," controlling events from afar.

Omnipotence Phantasies

Elijah Kamski's belief in the rise of technology and his desire for control over the future reveal his omnipotence fantasies. Kamski envisions androids surpassing human capabilities, predicting they will dominate fields like healthcare, education, and even governance. His statement, "Our androids are already replacing humans in many fields," supports his view that this change is inevitable and beneficial. His prediction that androids will "make the best decisions in humanity's interest" reflects his belief in their superiority and his role as a guiding force (PlayStation, 2018). Jones (1923) argues that individuals with a god complex often reject perspectives that challenge their worldview, further solidifying Kamski's controlling outlook (p. 216).

Kamski maintains subtle control over CyberLife's creations through a hidden program "emergency exits." His statement, "I always leave an emergency exit in my programs... You never know," reveals his readiness to intervene and exert authority if necessary (*Detroit: Become Human*, in "Meet Kamski"). Jones (1923) links such behavior to omnipotence phantasies, where foresight and control represent dominance over unforeseen outcomes (p. 216).

During an interview, Kamski dismisses concerns about unemployment caused by androids, comparing it to historical technological advancements. His smug expression conveys indifference to societal issues, reflecting a belief that technological progress is inevitable and beneficial. Jones (1923) describes this behavior as characteristic of individuals who resist opposing viewpoints to maintain their sense of control (p. 217). The DSM-5 similarly highlights arrogance and dismissiveness as traits of narcissistic personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 762). Kamski's aloof demeanor underscores his detachment from societal concerns and reinforces his god complex.

Attitude Towards Time

Elijah Kamski's behavior reveals his belief in controlling time, reflecting his perceived superiority. When Hank Anderson and Connor visit, Kamski calmly swims, making them wait while prioritizing his schedule over theirs. His slow movements and deliberate laps emphasize his disregard for their urgency, establishing authority through passive aggression. This behavior aligns with the DSM-5's description of entitlement, where individuals expect preferential treatment while dismissing others' priorities (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Kamski's extended routine conveys control over time and passive punishment for the detectives' unannounced arrival.

Kamski's view of time extends to the future, asserting authority over Connor by framing android-human conflict as inevitable. His statement, "A war is coming... you'll have to choose your side," underscores his predictive stance. His words reflect a god complex described by Jones (1923), where individuals feel they control time and freely issue warnings (p. 219). Kamski's demeanor suggests certainty about the future, diminishing Connor's autonomy.

In media interviews, Kamski dismisses societal concerns about androids, framing technological progress as inevitable: "Who wants to turn their back on progress?" By equating androids with the steam engine and electricity, Kamski positions himself as a historical figure advancing society. His belief in progress parallels Jones's claim that individuals with a god complex perceive their vision of time as naturally correct (p. 218). Kamski's response also reflects confidence in his foresight, fitting Jones's description of power over future time. His dismissal of societal concerns underscores a belief in his ability to guide humanity toward a predetermined future.

Social Inequality

The impacts of Kamski's God complex influence across society in the game *Detroit: Become Human*, influencing both social inequality and societal instability. His pursuit of power, reflected in android obedience and dehumanization, perpetuates systems of control that prioritize dominance over equity and stability. These dynamics are explored through the game's depiction of structural hierarchies, marginalized groups, and the societal unrest they ignite.

Androids' inability to disobey humans in *Detroit: Become Human* reflects Kamski's God complex, where power and control outweigh freedom and fairness. Androids' programming enforces strict obedience, resembling a hierarchical system where rebellion is punished as deviance. This submission supports a societal structure where androids are tools, not autonomous beings, ensuring humans maintain control. Key moments, such as Kara's forced passivity to Todd's abusive commands and Markus's inaction under Carl's orders, demonstrate how obedience overrides morality and agency. Driscoll (2016) describes this control as maintaining power through submission and sacrifice (p. 95). The label "deviant android" stigmatizes those who challenge this system, reinforcing structural theism, where sacrifices uphold societal order.

Discrimination mirrors real-world marginalization, with androids blamed for societal problems, as seen in protests against Markus. Protest slogans like "We want work!" highlight systemic deflection, where failures like economic inequality redirect anger toward androids. Kamski's claim that androids "never say no" emphasizes human dominance, reflecting control central to the god complex. Segregation, as seen in android compartments on buses, underscores enforced hierarchies and dehumanization. Daniel's breakdown after learning he will be replaced illustrates how oppression leads to defiance, as violence becomes a response to systemic abuse.

The abuse of androids, such as Carlos's violence and Ralph's scarring, reveals the normalization of cruelty. Zlatko's exploitation further symbolizes the god complex's sacrifice for control. These examples critique power dynamics that prioritize human supremacy. As Driscoll (2016) notes, the god complex sustains control through violence and dehumanization, perpetuating societal

inequality (p. 71). Androids in *Detroit: Become Human* thus reflect real-world systemic oppression under the guise of societal order.

Societal Instability

Markus's story in *Detroit: Become Human* reflects societal power dynamics tied to the god complex, where dominance is maintained through dehumanization and violence. Markus, wrongly accused of his master Carl's death, is discarded in an android graveyard but escapes to lead Jericho, a group fighting for freedom. His journey critiques systems that justify violence to uphold societal hierarchies, aligning with Driscoll's (2016) theory of the god complex, which sustains power by marginalizing others (p. 66-67).

Kamski, the android creator, embodies narcissistic leadership by prioritizing control over societal well-being. His pursuit of innovation disregards the societal harm caused by android-induced unemployment, which exacerbates inequality and unrest. As Khorram-Manesh (2024) explains, narcissistic leaders prioritize personal ambition over societal stability, perpetuating violence and inequality (p. 12-14). The rising unemployment, poverty, and social frustration illustrated through the homeless man and Todd's struggles reflect the devastating impact of Kamski's unchecked ambitions.

Markus's peaceful protests further critique oppressive systems. His march for equality, met with violence, highlights the fear and resistance of those in power to societal change. Kamski's influence perpetuates androids' systematic dehumanization, reinforcing hierarchical structures through intentional design choices that deny androids autonomy. As Khorram-Manesh (2024) argues, narcissistic leaders deny social suffering while using force to maintain control (p. 13). The suppression of Markus's march reflects how systems rooted in fear and dominance react aggressively to challenges, fostering instability.

Ultimately, Markus's rebellion symbolizes resistance to oppression, exposing the failures of systems that dehumanize marginalized groups to sustain societal order. These narrative critiques the long-term instability caused by narcissistic leadership and God-complex-driven systems.

CONCLUSION

Elijah Kamski, a pivotal character in *Detroit: Become Human*, embodies traits associated with a god complex, influencing societal structures and dynamics. His self-effacement masks intellectual dominance, using humility to control narratives while projecting an image of approachability. Kamski's aloofness, evident in his isolated residence and emotional detachment, reinforces his superiority and disconnect from societal concerns. His mysterious nature, characterized by cryptic speech and calculated distance, amplifies his influence by forcing others to speculate on his motives. Kamski's belief in technological superiority reflects omnipotence fantasies, as he envisions androids surpassing humanity and sees himself as a guiding force for progress. This attitude aligns with narcissistic traits, including dismissiveness and arrogance, while perpetuating hierarchical systems that favor control over equality. His manipulation of time and societal narratives further underscores his authority, emphasizing his perceived power over both the present and future. The societal instability depicted in the narrative criticizes Kamski's leadership. His disregard for the consequences of android integration exacerbates inequality and unrest, mirroring real-world systemic oppression. Through Markus's rebellion, the story highlights the failure of systems rooted in dehumanization and dominance, challenging the enduring impact of narcissistic leadership and hierarchical control. Kamski's portrayal exposes the dangers of unchecked ambition and societal detachment.

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