Colossus, the Forbin Project

Computers promise to be marvelous servants to mankind, but, like fire, they can make terrible masters as is illustrated in *Colossus, the Forbin Project*. Colossus, unfortunately, gets out of hand with his programming for peace on earth and begins working to achieve his end regardless of whose or how many toes get stepped on. The computer shows us that there is a very thin line between dictatorship and godship, and we are left to decide on which side of the line Colossus belongs. Because of Colossus’ takeover, humans lose, of feel that they have lost, their freedom, but this depends on the definition of freedom.

In the logical workings of a computer mind, the end always justifies the means. Once an end is reached, the things that come before are past, forgotten. They no longer exist, so they never existed. What is past is not and never was, unless it leaves behind some sign of its having been. And if what it leaves behind is good, it follows that the thing itself must have been good. This is completely reasonable; it is the way Colossus thought. The end Colossus had in mind was peace on earth, undeniable a good thing. Therefore, he was justified in using any means at his disposal to achieve it, even to world domination. Wars are the result of power struggles, and Colossus had a built-in monopoly on power. By asserting this power, he gained world control, immediately effecting a permanent, worldwide halt to all conflict. The fact that he had to destroy a few thousand people in doing this is without consequence. He is either simply removing obstacles in his path or proving his strength in order to further his cause. Since the cause men programmed him for takes precedence over any other concerns, it is only reasonable for Colossus to employ all his great power in reaching his end.

But the logical, impersonal way in which he makes peace raises a question about Colossus’ absolute power and his ultimate goal for mankind: Is Colossus just a machine or is he a god? The god? Any god at all? The answer to this is no. In Colossus’ first address to the people of the world, “This is the voice of World Control….” he states flatly that they will come to love him; they already respect him. These, love and respect, are two of the things a god demands of his people. If these exist, there follows obedience. Colossus would seem to be doing it backward, starting at obedience and working from there. He had reasoned that the human race needs a unifying force, so he will be that force. He foresees a time when they will not only accept him, his control of their lives; they will welcome it, take pride in it, feel it as
a bond between all of them. Perhaps he doesn't understand the nature of the being who made him. He obviously doesn't know or doesn't want to admit that humans are, for the most part, the most illogical, irrational creatures on the face of the earth. They cannot accept his way any more than he could adjust to theirs. So they will always be at war with him, mentally and spiritually if not physically. He will not be loved, and he's a machine and is thus unable to give love. A god gives love to his people, along with all of the other things. A god’s role is that of Almighty Creator—but Colossus is not almighty. He cannot control the minds of the humans. He is not a creator—he himself was created. He can make nothing—without the hands of those who created him in the first place. There is no way he could be a god—he simply does not fit the definition.

However, even if Colossus isn’t a god, he still has the power to manipulate and alter and take the lives of human beings. His control represents loss of the freedom and independence that seems to be essential for the survival of some human beings. He controls their physical lives: where they go, what they do, who lives, who dies. This doesn’t mean that he controls their minds. The reasonable thing for them to do would be to obey Colossus, to benefit from his great intellect, and to live in peace, mentally and spiritually free. Colossus is perfectly willing to be benevolent; in fact, he was designed to be. As long as they cooperate, they stay alive in a world free of conflict, disease, famine, overpopulation—all of man’s age-old problems. However, Colossus has neglected to compensate for the irrationality of the human race as a whole. They value what they call freedom more highly than life; they always have and always will. They would never be happy under his rule. But there is no real reason for refusing to obey him. After all, they asked for it, and they got what they wanted: the ultimate computer.

The humans simply didn’t realize that a computer like Colossus, absolutely impregnable and with absolute power, would stop at nothing in the cold-blooded, reasonable pursuit of his goal. Regardless of his absoluteness, Colossus is not all-powerful, not really. He cannot control the minds that created him. He was merely a product of man’s desire for ultimate peace, coupled with a brilliant creative mind. Unfortunately, even that brilliant mind could not foresee what Colossus could and would do or that this action would result in the loss of the physical freedom that is so precious to the aggressive human being. The moral of the story would seem to be the same as the one in Aesop’s fable: look before you leap. But men never learn—and that’s why they built Colossus in the first place.
The Blueprint Parts for the Analysis Essay

Thesis:
Computers promise to be marvelous servants to mankind, but, like fire, they can make terrible masters as is illustrated in Colossus, the Forbin Project.

Reason Why the Thesis is True #1:
1. Colossus, unfortunately, gets out of hand with his programming for peace on earth and begins working to achieve his end regardless of whose or how many toes get stepped on.
2. In the logical workings of a computer mind, the end always justifies the means. Once an end is reached, the things that come before are past, forgotten.
3. The humans simply didn't realize that a computer like Colossus, absolutely impregnable and with absolute power, would stop at nothing in the cold-blooded, reasonable pursuit of his goal.

Reason Why the Thesis is True #2:
1. The computer shows us that there is a very thin line between dictatorship and godship, and we are left to decide on which side of the line Colossus belongs.
2. But the logical, impersonal way in which he makes peace raises a question about Colossus’ absolute power and his ultimate goal for mankind: Is Colossus just a machine or is he a god? The god? Any god at all?
3. Regardless of his absoluteness, Colossus is not all-powerful, not really.

Reason Why the Thesis is True #3:
1. Because of Colossus’ takeover, humans lose, of feel that they have lost, their freedom, but this depends on your definition of freedom.
2. His control represents loss of the freedom and independence that seems to be essential for the survival of some human beings.
3. Unfortunately, even that brilliant mind could not foresee what Colossus could and would do or that this action would result in the loss of the physical freedom that is so precious to the aggressive human being.

Transitional sentences:

From 1 to 2
But the logical, impersonal way in which he makes peace raises a question about Colossus’ absolute power and his ultimate goal for mankind….

From 2 to 3
There is no way he could be a god—he simply does not fit the definition. However, even if Colossus isn’t a god, he still has the power to manipulate and alter and take the lives of human beings.

From 3 to 1
…but this depends on your definition of freedom. In the logical workings of a computer mind…. (beginning)
…they got what they wanted: the ultimate computer. The humans simply didn’t realize…. (end)