

*The Automatic Man: Part 2 – The Fully Automatic Man*

The Fully Automatic Man watches as an ant, diligently scouring the frozen concrete floor of the prison cell, searches selflessly for some scrap of food to bring back to his comrades in the colony. Meanwhile, pure violent intent emanates from a dark corner of the cell. Its source; a spider, sitting patiently on its web, watching the ant with eight horrible eyes. The ant continues its journey, probing the ground ahead with its little feelers, chirping the way ants do, clicking its mandibles together. But suddenly the ant finds that it cannot move. One of its back legs has become entangled in a far shoot of the spider's web. The ant struggles in earnest to free itself, but is unable to escape, and as the shadow of the spider descends the poor creature cries in desperation to break away. But in a moment even the cries are silenced as a menacing fang juts from the spider's jaw and plunges deep into the ant, filling its body with poison, paralyzing it. Then, having its victim handicapped in this way, the spider begins to wrap the ant up tightly in a silk thread, and drags the immobilized prisoner back towards the centre of the web. By this time, the inside of the ant's body has begun to liquefy, a result of the digestive enzymes which the spider had filled it with. With its eight horrible eyes looking lifelessly ahead, the spider contently sucks the juices out the exoskeleton. The ant is no more.

The Fully Automatic Man sits there, watching this gruesome scene, unsurprised.

"I have lived now for thousands of years. Generations of people have born and died. Times of war, times of peace. Times of bounty and many droughts. But the people are always the same. Hateful. Hateful of their neighbours, hateful of themselves, and most of all, hateful of me, because I refuse to pretend! They would prefer that I pretend. Pretend that I wasn't the Fully Automatic Man. But what good is it to be a Fully Automatic Man if you can't be a *Fully Automatic Man!*"

A sound echoes throughout the cell. The Fully Automatic Man jerks his head from side to side, listening intently, trying to place its source. It happens again, a small shuffling, like a padded hand scratching against the inside of the wall. The Fully Automatic Man goes towards the source of this sound, but there is nothing there, just cold concrete, mercilessly.

"There is no place in this world for me. How can an automatic man live in a non-automatic world? This world could never satisfy me. In fact, it is a hostile environment. Every organism needs a digestive tract, every machine an exhaust. But this world offers no outlet for my automations! To what work could I dedicate myself? I am angered by this world. I am frustrated by it. I am capable of so much, yet I cannot do a thing. My automation is my prison."

"Why am I here, in this cell? The answer is exceedingly simple. Why is anyone imprisoned, really? Because they do not belong in a society. Murderers don't belong on the streets. *They do not belong!* Just as I, I who am innocent of everything and guilty of nothing save for being fully automatic, do not belong."

"The people don't want to see full automation. It's too uncomfortable for them. It makes them too aware of their own...*non-automation*. No, they would prefer a sham, a quack or mock prophet to preach to their insecurities, to *lie*. I am incapable of lying. It clashes with my programming. Or they would prefer that automation exist in some distant region, some place unreachable and invisible from whence descend a benevolent automatic providence. Sometimes I feel like breaking down and crying, and verily I do, because it is the only thing that lets some of this horrible weight off my chest. I cry and cry and moan until my stomach heaves and I feel like I am going to vomit up all the poison I have had to ingest in this non-automatic world!"

“My only consolation is that they must live with themselves. With their *non-automation*. But what good is my full automation, if I can do nothing with it? How far can I go, sitting here all by myself? A fully automatic being can only exist with other fully automatic beings. I feel my lungs collapsing on themselves for sheer loss of will to persist.”

The Fully Automatic Man makes to slump and resume his requiem but the cell is once again invaded by the sound. The Fully Automatic Man follows the steady shuffling noise to its source, but again finds that it emanates from beyond the cold slab of concrete. He knocks hard against the wall, hoping to alert whatever is there into silence. A few seconds pass. It shuffles again.

At this moment the appointed hour is struck and a choir of little old ladies dressed in habits line up in front of the Fully Automatic Man’s cell. Through the bars they point their crooked with arthritis fingers at the Fully Automatic Man and let forth a barrage of insults, screeched out through chattering false teeth. The Fully Automatic Man tries to defend himself against their curses, but his words don’t reach them, for each and every single last one of these little old ladies is completely deaf.

“These old, these ignorant, these out-of-touch with reality hags! Look at how they stand there with those demonic scowls glued to their faces and *belch* out hatred like a drunk with a shotgun, spraying everything around them, and all this with such *certainty*, such unshakable assuredness in themselves, despite all the grotesque evidence to the contrary, all because they can tie it to something that, in their own deranged minds, proves the truth of their words in and of themselves. What do they tie it to? Religion, tradition, age, dogma...anything really, anything that suits their purpose, because, truth being, they did not come here to *reason*. No, they came to *condemn*. Look at how they brag with such confidence of their own piety. These same women, in the medieval ages, would have been front row and centre at all the executions, the public stonings and the burnings at the stake. I can picture them, right there in the throng round the pyre, screaming ‘*Burn her! Burn her!!!*’, that horrible underbite with the missing teeth expelling pungent hatred from rotting lungs. Their self-assured piety is nothing but a product of their times. The recipient of their hate is nothing but a product of their times. But there is no use with them. Words fall on deaf ears, and perceptions are such that I am painted the villain. I find myself fighting odds that were waged against me, cards dealt that spell disaster, a gambler in a casino where the house always wins.”

“What is so horrible is that I can see, in perfect clarity, their point of view, unreasonable and built upon false presumptions and the nervous whisperings of frail egos as it is. I can see it, I can see even why they would believe it, wrong though it remains, and this makes it all the more horrible for me because it means I can *sympathize* with them. Oh, no! How severe it is, to be subjected to an unjust prosecutor who condemns you for a crime you did not commit and to still *sympathize* with him? I feel ready to vomit, although I have not eaten in days, for gross repulsion that builds insidiously in my gut.”

The little old ladies hobble away. The shuffling sound is heard once again, this time coming from another corner of the cell. The Fully Automatic Man runs over to it, banging against the wall, desperately hoping to silence whatever is back there, so that he can save for himself at least the quiet as companion to his loneliness.

“They ask me what I intend to do. This must be a rhetorical question. To be able to intend anything, to want one outcome or another, to hope that the work you invest will one day bear fruit, one must have, at the minimum, a semblance of choice. But even this has been taken from me. I am left with no options. If I am to fight, I fight to win. If I win, I lose, because my victory will just be used as another reason to condemn me. This is getting to be too much, I feel that I must crack under the pressure. If only one of them were to understand, understand what it’s like to be fully automatic and

not be able to do a thing about it! No, they refuse to understand, that would be too much to ask of them, no, instead they toss me in a cold cell and hurl vile insults like the most pungent of phlegms collected from the depths of their dark souls.”

“The pain I feel is only because of the non-automation of it all. It only hurts because it *is* unfair. It hurts because I could never do to them what they have done to me. Because I won’t engage in their non-automatic ways. But how could I ever engage in their non-automatic ways!? How could I sit amongst them, squabbling and squawking and spewing pure unfiltered hatred? They sit together for dinner and curse each other as they leave the table! They form the basest of political ties, *‘I’ll watch your back if you watch mine’*, and then, with breakneck speed, find the first glimmer of an opportunity to cut these same ties for the smallest advantage to be had. If only I could lose this sense of duty, this idea of *auto-morality* that’s been nothing but a curse unto me, which in fact has only harmed me and brought burning tears to well in my eyes, has swollen my heart with hatred and frozen my body stiff with the absolute cold of total, unforgiving loneliness.”

The shuffling sound is heard again. The Fully Automatic Man lets out a roar and rushes towards the source of the sound. Having given up any hope of silencing this intrusion to his solitude, he bangs violently against the wall, hoping to kill whatever is back there. “Die, die, die, die, oh why oh why will you not just die!?” weeps the Fully Automatic Man. A moment later, a soft whimper is heard. The shuffling noise stops. The Fully Automatic Man slumps away from the wall and collapses to the cold concrete floor, his head inclined towards the bars of his cell. A few moments pass. The sound of rusty wheels rolling is heard approaching down the hallway. A prison guard walks past the cell, pushing a metal cart with the bruised and battered body of a dead puppy placed upon it. He casts the Fully Automatic Man a look of pure contempt.

“I’ve been hearing things lately. They’re heard in an echoing cavern of my mind, through the nightmarish landscapes that assault me without end. It’s a voice. A voice suggesting something to me. A solution to my problems. *‘Do something...non-automatic’* the voice says, *‘then you will be better prepared to digest what this world will inevitably feed you’*. But I don’t know how to take this route. Something...something has to switch, an electric current in my fully automatic brain must short wire, burst, fizzle and pop, send the wrong transmission, fail completely. I am powerless to will this. It goes against everything that gives my existence meaning. What am I, if not the Fully Automatic Man?”