

Golem

It always starts the same way.

I open my eyes to find myself lying on the bed and on top of the covers in a cheap but clean hotel room. I'm naked; my clothes will be sitting on the dresser, ready for me when I get out of the shower. I always shower and brush my teeth, using the complimentary stuff the hotel leaves out for guests.

My morning ablutions are usually pretty brief. I never shave; it's never an issue. I did use to look at myself in the mirror, until I realized that I didn't really care what I looked like. So I just put on my clothes. They're always nondescript, broken-in, and clean.

Under the clothes is the folder with the name, address, and picture of the person I'm to kill. And the gun I'm to use. Those both can change from task to task. The gun is always one that I can use and easy to hide, and it's always appropriate for the area. As for the folder... it used to be that the folder would include all sorts of reasons why any decent person would want the target to die; but it stopped including that information after a while. I think that whoever provided it finally realized that I didn't need the constant reassurance. I mean, I obviously *care* that I'm not being used to kill innocent people; but by now it's just as obvious that I'm going after bad ones. I'm fine with that.

After I shower, dress, arm myself, and look at the folder, I walk out the door. There's never a key and I never check out. Why bother? It's not like I checked in, and I'm not going back anyway. I still leave a tip for the cleaning staff, though. They need to change the towels, after all.

I never kill somebody right away. Well, I would if I *needed* to, but I usually get some time beforehand. I used to spend that time sitting on park benches or whatnot, but then I started finding movie tickets or guidebooks among my pile of clothes. I can take a hint: so I assume now that I can amuse myself ahead of time.

What I do varies. Always a nice meal; if there's a movie I want to see, I go see it. If I'm somewhere there's a museum, I go take a look. If nothing else appeals, I like walking. Or else maybe read: there are a couple of books that I'm churning through, one chunk at a time.

I know, that sounds dull. But I don't drink and I don't have sex. I mean, I **can**. I can get drunk and I can have an orgasm. It's just that I don't usually feel the *urge* to do either. And the places I go, I don't really see many people obsessively pursuing drugs or sex who seem all that happy about it. In fact, most of them seem pretty miserable. Which is none of my business, of course, but you can't help but notice things like that when it's constantly appearing in your face, as it were.

But since it's, again, none of my business, let's talk about the killings. They're actually very easy, to the point where I wonder why "I" even need be there in the first place. A robot could do this: find the person to be killed, follow the person to be killed, shoot the person to be killed, walk away. At least, I think that a robot could do this - or at least, whoever it is that sends me out on these missions could create something functionally equivalent to a robot that could do this. Is there something about **me** that's important to the entire process? Something that would simply not be present if it was being done by a hypothetical automaton?

...Yes, I sometimes think about this. Admittedly, not with any real urgency. I more or less assume that I am 'told' everything that I need to know; and that I have been designed to not really *want* to know more. That this does not bother me suggest that I am designed not to care about this, either.

And that I am designed not to care about how I don't care; one can follow that particular infinite regress for quite some time before one gets bored. Which I **am** capable of, interestingly; also, I'm not really sure but I *think* that I even have a working free will. Apparently having it was *also* deemed a necessary part of my makeup.

If this was a different kind of story, I'd be ending it differently than the way it invariably ends in real life. Perhaps I would flub the killing, or decide to show mercy, or rebel against the anonymous directed violence that defines my existence. And ultimately I'd give you an *answer*. But there are no answers here: it's a capital-M Mystery, and people will simply have to accept that they're not going to get a solution to it today. Because I see the target now...

Oh, describing him is irrelevant. He's a person. I trust that he's bad, but you can't really see it on his face - and, more to the point, neither can I. He's certainly not expecting somebody to come up behind him and put three bullets in his back, which is two more than I needed to shoot but somehow necessary all the same. From there it's a short walk to an alleyway where I can vanish without fuss. I drop the gun, of course. The police will want it; it'll make them feel better, especially since they can nicely classify the killer as a professional assassination. Which, honestly, it more or less is.

Once I'm out of sight I start to disappear. It's an odd, yet pleasant experience: I sort of feel my body lose cohesion and drift back to rejoin the rest of the universe. No pain, of course. The entire process only takes a few moments, which is usually enough to let me wonder whether or not this is the last time.

After all, I apparently work for someone or something that tries to be solicitous of me: does that extend to my ultimate fate? Does my duty have an end? Will I eventually be rewarded?

Or is this the reward? It's something to think about, as I drift off to sleep...

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