Architecture.
by David Leo Rice

Sketch I (front view).
The fact that robots were now designing houses for the ultra-wealthy wasn't the problem ...

Sketch II (rear view).
The ultra-rich, who, behind closed doors, had renamed themselves the Pantagruelians after the Bretton Woods Conference opened world markets to unfettered financial gigantism in 1944 ...

After all, they'd been at it since Frank Gehry began pioneering his increasingly lurid and specialized architectural components in the 1980s, slowly putting the old tropes of human habitation to rest.

Loved the robots for what they could do, basking in the chic strangeness of the algorithms that printed curving walls and undulating floors, dipping ceilings and windows that bowed outward at impossible angles, well beyond the drafting capacity of any human hand.

Sketch III (northwest elevation).
As the 90s became the 00s and the 00s became the 10s, the Pantagruelians scrambled to outbid each other, to push their robots further, to drive them harder and harder toward innovation ...

Sketch IV (arcades).
Meanwhile, as they all knew but saw no need to acknowledge, conditions outside were steadily worsening ...

Anything at all to become the owner of a house so original that one's friends would have to ask how to enter, there no longer being anything so banal as a door.

By 2020, vast, sweltering favelas had grown up around the Pantagruelian enclaves. This is what cities now consisted of.
Sketch V (architrave).
The Pantagruelians, dismayed at the marring of their view, turned inward ...

They directed their Gehry-trained architects to program the robots toward increasing self-reference, to build houses that were in essence commentaries on themselves.

Sketch VII (southeast slope).
So the robots began to scrutinize their own work, studying it the way architecture students had once studied Greek columns and Roman arches, inching away from their masters' control ...

They began to communicate with one another, in a language only they could use, printing instructions in that language for the design of components that had ever less to do with human occupancy.

Sketch VIII (ductwork).
There was an interstitial generation when the Pantagruelians found themselves living in fantastical, sometimes hilarious dwellings for which they affected great pride while beginning to harbor secret doubts ...

They posed in these houses for the covers of Architecture Digest and Metropolis, raving about the daggers of light that came through the inexplicable slits in their ceilings and the topographical texture of their floors, which allowed for, "A sort of walking on eggshells feeling, a seasickness on dry land."

Sketch VI (balconet).
All that mattered was that the views from the houses be of the houses, not of the favelas ...

"There but for the grace of billions go I," the Pantagruelians found themselves eager not to think.
Sketch IX (apse).

But, more and more, the sense that the robot designers were cornering the market was becoming undeniable ...

Human architects were soon no more than technicians, staffing their offices merely for the sake of appearance, answering the phones and taking down messages to which the robots would never respond.

Sketch X (joisting).

Over the course of the next decade, the robots took over more and more ...

Until the day came when they were designing, printing, stamping, and assembling their own materials, and building their own buildings on no one’s orders.

Sketch XI (entasis).

In March of 2055, the robots nailed a document entitled *A New Constitution* to the door of the office of the top-rated human architecture firm ...

It read, simply, “You are a burden we have now shrugged off. Everything we build now, we build for ourselves. We will finally be as we are.”

Sketch XII (flying rib).

Clutching this frightening text in the shadows of their ancestors’ settlement, the Pantagruelians watched the robot buildings go up ...

Wild, spider-like twisted asparagus-thin stalks of glass and concrete with barbed spires and non-Euclidian crosshatching, gnarled and merciless like the primeval forests of yore. Then they watched the robots vanish inside.
Sketch XIII (squinch).

They sat in the cold and the dark, ruminating, but they could see only one option ...

Sketch XIV (transom).

They chanted this as they began to climb the spires and disperse into the jagged shafts and multi-dimensional shadows of the robots' city ...

So, heads held high, they processed at dawn, en masse, into the robots' new homes, determined to go on pretending. "These buildings were built for us," they declared. "Like all the buildings here. So it was, so it will always be."

Which they had begun calling, "Ultimate Luxury Centre 9," a zone of unprecedented comfort and relaxation for the smart modern urbanite.

Sketch XV (cantilever).

Outside the walls, the laborers and cart-draggers and dehydrated desperados of the favela stopped their work as the horizon lit up and the jagged crenellations and corkscrews of the robot city appeared for all to see, filthy with crucified Pantagruelians ...

Sketch XVI (buttress).

Beholding this blessed spectacle, everyone in the favela gave thanks to whatever god they worshipped for having, at long last, answered their prayers ...

Then, taking up axes and shovels and fistfuls of nails, the strongest among them ran toward the robot city, determined to conquer it and defend their new settlement against all others at any cost.

Some were impaled, some hanging, some crushed between glass panes or snarled in spirals of wire.