

**The Chester County Automaton(s)**

by  
Brad Cupples

Brad Cupples  
PO BOX 721841  
NEWPORT, KY 41072-1841  
Email: [brad.cupples@gmail.com](mailto:brad.cupples@gmail.com)  
© 2006

## **THE CHESTER COUNTY AUTOMATON(S)**

### Synopsis

The First Uniform Church of Perpetual Joy and Humility has been faced with it's greatest fear, the local Scientist Doctor Metternich is in the process of creating an Automaton, a mechanical man. This horrific event can only mean that the “End Times” are at hand. Luckily the Pagan-Blasphemer-Anti-Christ is unaware to the extremes that the people of Chester County are willing to take to see his demise. With the power of prayer and a pancake breakfast, there is little doubt that this demon will soon be launched back into his dark hold in the hoary netherworld. Of course, all of this assumes that Metternich actually is the Anti-Christ

The young son of the minister, Grayson, is the living embodiment of teenage angst, unsure of himself, his beliefs, and his place in the world. He latches onto a harshly deformed and mentally handicapped girl. He devotes himself to her fully and slowly we see Grayson abandoning all reason and sensibility as he tries to justify his sophomoric “love” to a very confused town and also to Lisa, a very jealous young woman dead set on having the preacher's son, as hers... at ANY costs. His biggest fears arrive in the form of the puritanical Captain Swing, a somber figure dedicated to a harsh life of self denial. A man whose dark outlook strikes terror into the hearts of even the most faithful church-goers, Swing also happens to be the father of the girl that Grayson has fallen in love with.

This play was selected out of over 350 scripts from across the US, Canada, and Great Britain for production in the 2007 Y.E.S. Festival of new plays where it received very positive reviews. This is a fast-paced comedy about people that have chosen to abandon all reason and follow their emotions without thought. It is a wild farce and a biting satire of the overly melodramatic times in which we live. THE CHESTER COUNTY AUTOMATON (S) is a timely story that capitalizes on the battle between religion and science without taking itself too seriously.

## Cast of Characters

- GRAYSON.....A young man dealing with more than his share of teen angst; son of Brother Vandeville and Nancy.
- DOCTOR METTERNICHE.....A very logical and rational scientist, in a very irrational town.
- BROTHER VANDEVILLE..... A man called to the ministry for it's many comforts and none of it's responsibilities. He strives to avoid conflicts, especially when they could hurt his image.
- LISA.....A self-centered and manipulative girl who assumes her looks should get her whatever she wants.
- CAPTAIN SWING.....A crusty old fisherman, constantly riding an extremely fine line between fanatical puritanism and violent schizophrenia.
- REESE.....The younger and more militant of the adults on the church council; he would have made an excellent soldier in another life.
- NANCY VANDEVILLE.....Doting wife and loving mother, who would be just as happy in her kitchen cooking up "special treats" as anywhere else in the world.
- LEVADA RAE:  
OUIDA MAE.....Two well-intentioned ladies of the Church
- MARY.....A severely deformed young woman, looking more like a mountain buffalo covered in bandages than a human being.

Setting:

Chester County, a small southern town that could exist anywhere. The action moves from the Church Meetinghouse, to the house of Doctor Metternich and to the local hospital. The set does not necessarily need to be elaborate . A simple unit set with some re-arrangeable pieces could easily take care of all the locations needed.

Time:

The action in the play occurs in the present ,within the span of a few days.

Note:

The character of Mary must look as absurdly inhuman and ridiculous as possible. Any attempts to have her played by a normal person without the aid of a special costume or makeup would not only be counterproductive, but the less spectacular, the less effective the message of the play becomes.

ACT 1SCENE 1

INT. Meeting house of The First Uniform Church of Perpetual Joy and Humility

(Loud garish southern gospel music blares as lights come up to reveal The First Uniform Church of Perpetual Joy and Humility in the middle of a church council meeting. Brother Vandeville stands center with his pre-planned speech rolling off his tongue like a world class televangelist. Watching intently are Reese, Levada Rae, Ouida Mae And Nancy Vandeville. An unenthusiastic Grayson watches with a mild level of annoyance.)

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Brothers and Sisters we are at the dawning of a new age. All too well can I hear the callings of the lord. I see his majestic glory even here in these unraveling skeins of our destiny. His plan is coming to a close and it is now that his motives and goals will become clear to the holy followers of his word. Our little world has been divided between the truth seekers and the scientists who seek nothing less than to replace our cherished beliefs with their wild ramblings based on nonsense. Reality... Is not based on super-tiny microscopic elements. It is not based on the wild, erratic mixtures of pro-tons, neu-trons, and the elusive elec-torn. It is not based on D.N.A., cells, particles, ions or any other such triviality. No, no, no --life, it is based on the will of a being that is too powerful... Too complex... too magnificent, to ever be understood by mortal men.

REESE

Which is why Doctor Metternich must be stopped!

GRAYSON

What?

REESE

Dr. Metternich has long been a gentle thorn in our collective sides; but now he has trespassed into God's territory.

OUIDA MAE

It's abomination!

NANCY VANDEVILLE

It's sacrilege!

LEVADA RAYE

He's a madman!

GRAYSON

He's a genius.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

What are you saying?!

GRAYSON

I mean, you can't deny that the man's brilliant. He is smart enough to figure all that stuff out and invent all those machines.

REESE

I hear the dark lord Lucifer is all too pleasant a sociopath as well. Would you like to take a turn defending him? Brother Vandeville, with all due respect, I think your son may be under the influence of the dark lord's henchman.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Now, hold your horses there. He never said that Metternich wasn't a blaspheming sinner -inspired by the handiwork of Satan himself and doomed to hellfire for all eternity -- all he said was that Metternich is a brilliant man. That doesn't mean...

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Brilliant! What's so brilliant about becoming the pawn of Beelzebub? Grayson, hon, is Satan speaking through you right now. It's ok to tell mommy.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Nancy, Don't tell him that it's alright for Satan to speak through him.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Well, maybe if he felt comfortable talking to you about his problems he would let us know when evil spirits are using him as their ventriloquial figure.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Grayson, tell your mother that Satan isn't speaking through you.

GRAYSON

He isn't, mom.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Well, that's good.

GRAYSON

Do you really think Doctor Metternich is working for the devil?

REESE

Have you seen the papers this morning? It's all there.

(He hands Grayson a copy of the newspaper.)

LEVADA RAYE

It's the end.

OUIDA MAE

Downfall of human kind.

LEVADA RAYE

Harbinger of doomsday.

OUIDA MAE

We're moments from judgment.

GRAYSON

"Scientist develops robotic brain model." It can't be that bad.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Not bad?

OUIDA MAE

It's horrible.

LEVADA RAYE

He wants to replace us all with machines.

OUIDA MAE

Godless machines with no mercy and no souls!

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Now, ladies, I'm sure Doctor Metternich would never want to replace you...

LEVADA RAYE

Oh, you say that now. But you just wait. One day you'll wake up and find your brain scooped up and dropped inside the head of some evil machine, unable to escape... unable to feel... forced to do the bidding of Metternich!

OUIDA MAE

Metternich wants our brains!

LEVADA RAYE

He'll use them to take over the world!

NANCY VANDEVILLE

He's going to destroy the human race!

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Calm down, ladies!

REESE

What's there to be calm about, Brother Vandeville? Doctor Metternich has stepped over the line this time. It's too far. Now, I'm a reasonable man. I respect what science has done for us. I don't know how my wife would get dinner cooked without the microwave. ---But when science steps over into the realm of the Bible, well... it has to be destroyed.

GRAYSON

I still don't get it?

REESE

Are you blind, son?!

GRAYSON

I just don't see what...

REESE

You don't see? You don't see? Open your eyes, or has that filthy scientist clouded your head?

LEVADA RAYE

The Devil has hexed the preacher's son!

NANCY VANDEVILLE

My baby!

OUIDA MAE

Little Grayson's eyes are under Satan's spell!

LEVADA RAYE

Get the holy water!

OUIDA MAE

Rebaptize him!

LEVADA RAYE

Out, evil spirits, out!

NANCY VANDEVILLE

In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Let go of my son!

LEVADA RAYE

Everybody, form a prayer circle!

(The women quickly surround Grayson  
literally trying to shake the devil  
out of him)

OUIDA MAE

We can't afford to lose him. He's too young!

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Pray everybody! Pray!

OUIDA MAE

We'll need him to fight in the war against Satan!

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

(kneeling down to Grayson, who has been knocked down in  
the commotion)

Ladies, please! Grayson, son, don't you see what Doctor  
Metternich is doing here?

GRAYSON

(reading from newspaper)

It's just says that Doctor Metternich "has come up with a way  
of building a computer that collects and stores data the same  
way a human brain does."

LEVADA RAYE

It's horrible!

OUIDA MAE

Horrific!

LEVADA RAYE

It's the end!

OUIDA MAE

The downfall of human kind!

LEVADA RAYE

The harbinger of doomsday!

OUIDA MAE

We're moments from judgment!

GRAYSON

It doesn't say anything about replacing people with machines.  
How does this make Dr. Metternich evil?

REESE

Mephistopheles is a tricky fella, Grayson. Doctor Metternich  
may not even realize he has signed his soul over to  
Antichrist.

OUIDA MAE  
Metternich is the Antichrist!

GRAYSON  
Metternich doesn't even believe in Christ.

LEVADA RAYE  
All the more reason for him to be the Antichrist! He's a  
pagan!

OUIDA MAE  
Pagan-Blasphemer-Antichrist!

BROTHER VANDEVILLE  
Calm down, ladies.

REESE  
We cannot allow him to create this robot -- this mechanical  
man -- it's unholy.

LEVADA RAYE  
He's blaspheming by recreating the lord's miracle of  
creation!

REESE  
He wants to see man recreated as an uncontrolled machine  
built in his own image, blindly obeying HIS commands!

OUIDA MAE  
He wants to take the place of God!

BROTHER VANDEVILLE  
Calm down, everyone! We can not allow Metternich's  
machinations to drive us into terror.

LEVADA RAYE  
Because the Devil can smell fear?

REESE  
That's right, Levada, and it only makes him stronger. He  
feeds on it.

OUIDA MAE  
Metternich can smell our fear!

LEVADA RAYE  
He knows where we are!

NANCY VANDEVILLE  
He'll come for our brains!

LEVADA RAYE  
We'll all be trapped inside machines!

OUIDA MAE

I don't want to be a machine!

(Pandemonium erupts)

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Larry, you cannot allow Doctor Metternich to get away with this.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Well... of course not.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Well... what are you going to do about it?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Oh, there are a lot of options on the table right now. Got to be careful though, don't want to make the wrong decision.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

What are the front-runners?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Oh, there's a few of them.

REESE

And which one are we going to choose?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Oh, I'm glad you asked... after a lot of serious thought I decided to go with the most direct option...

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Which is?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE (stalling)

That's why I decided... that the plan, that would be taken by The First Uniform Church of Perpetual Joy and Humility would be... To start a very 'very' forceful... letter writing campaign.

REESE

A letter writing campaign?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

That's right, Brother Reese. This is a drastic matter that must be dealt with in drastic means. Which is why I considered all the options and chose this, very drastic measure.

REESE

And who will you be "drastically" writing to?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Um... well, of course to the other congregations in the area, definitely.... and the mayor... the mayor's office, fine set of allies to have in the mayor's office.

REESE

But, how are we going to stop this from happening?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

I think you are doubting the power of a well-informed public.

REESE

Brother Vandeville, it's already been put in the paper. Everyone is already informed.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Well then, half the job is already done. All we need to do now is sit back and wait for something to be done.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Larry, hon, maybe we should set up a committee to work on other solutions.

REESE

That sounds perfect. Brother Vandeville, I'd like to volunteer to head up this committee.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Any objections? -- None? Alright Reese, this one's all yours.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

I'd like to make a motion that we hold a meeting Saturday morning for anyone interested in voicing their opinion on the situation.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

That sounds fine to me.

LEVADA RAYE

What about a pancake breakfast? There's not a soul in the whole of Christendom that can turn down a tasty flapjack for a good cause.

OUIDA MAE

I can bring preserves.

GRAYSON

Do I have to be there?

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Grayson, this is a battle between good and evil, between light and dark. If Metternich succeeds in his vile plans, it could mean Armageddon. The whole of our world is at stake. The lives of the innocent and the souls of all eternity.

GRAYSON

It's just a pancake breakfast.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Just a pancake breakfast? I think you are old enough to know better than that.

REESE

The pancake breakfast is the most powerful force the Christian Church can muster.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

It's the most practical way to corral a group of people and convince them to follow and support your cause that the lord ever created.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

...and you get a delicious meal to start your day.

GRAYSON

I just don't think Doctor Metternich has really done anything so awful.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

You just aren't old enough to see it.

GRAYSON

I'm eighteen.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

But you're still a child in God's eyes.

GRAYSON

What does that mean?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Grayson, when we asked you to sit on the Church council it was because we wanted to know the opinions of the younger members of the congregation...

GRAYSON

Fine then. My opinion is this is crazy.

(Reese rises enraged)

REESE

Well, Grayson, your opinion is wrong.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Grayson, why don't you go in the other room while we finish this up. Just go right on in there. There's some special treats in the blue bowl with the lid.

(As soon as he is out of the room she roughly grabs Reese by the collar.)

NANCY VANDEVILLE (Continued)

I'd thank you not to threaten my son, or, I swear before Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior I'll...

OUIDA MAE

Nancy!

LEVADA RAYE

Calm down, hon.

(She let's him go)

REESE

I'm sorry. I'm sorry it's just... Well, damn it, whole world's going to hell. Damned Scientists.

LEVADA RAYE

It's all right, Reese.

REESE

No, It's not. Metternich thinks he's better than us. Thinks he's so damned smart... Just because he went to school for a couple extra years. What the hell difference does that make anyway?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

I went to Seminary School for a year.

OUIDA MAE

A whole year?!?

(Vandeville doesn't answer)

REESE

It doesn't matter. We've got to stop him. We've got to stop Metternich and this evil machine of his.

(Captain Swing, a severe looking man appears in the doorway.)

CAPTAIN SWING

Well, well, well. Look at all this.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Captain Swing, we're in the middle of a committee meeting right now...

CAPTAIN SWING

A committee meeting?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Yes, Captain, the church council was called to discuss...

CAPTAIN SWING

Oh the church council. How quaint. I can only hope that ye are working on a new way to save souls from the hell fires of eternal damnation, as opposed to picking out which brand of doughnuts to have at "church bingo night". Or is it what to do on "Church movie night" this week? You make me sick. You're a filthy lot of gluttons and sinners, the whole bunch of you.

REESE

Actually, Captain Swing, we are planning on striking out on the Anti-Christ himself.

CAPTAIN SWING

Aye?

NANCY VANDEVILLE

That's right, Swing, we are going to destroy his diabolical plans once and for all.

CAPTAIN SWING

You? You're going to stop the plans of the devil? You think you can stop the devil? And how do you think you're going to pull that off? Good intentions and a couple spools of number twenty-four piano wire? This is the dark lord of the hoary netherworld, the tempter of men, the opposer of all that is good and holy. And you think you are going to destroy him? You? You pathetic band of dilly-dallying dandies. You moronic milksops. You're nothing but a bunch of chattering little monkeys sitting in a cage at the bottom of the ocean.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Now, Captain, that's hardly fair...

CAPTAIN SWING

Fair? You want to know about fair? We don't live in a fair world, preacher-man. You ought to have realized that by now. You think God wants to see you win? That he loves you so much that he's rooting for your team? God's laughing at you. Just like he's laughing at all of us. We are his playthings, nothing more.

REESE

What would you have us do, Swing? Just sit around and wait for Doctor Metternich to carry out his vile plans.

CAPTAIN SWING

Metternich? Ye didn't mention Metternich.

LEVADA RAYE

He's the one!

OUIDA MAE

He's the Antichrist!

REESE

He's creating a robotic brain that he plans on using to replace humanity.

CAPTAIN SWING

And you think he's the Antichrist? That's your devil, is it? Old Doctor Metternich.

REESE

Well, of course. He's blaspheming the Lord. He's trying to make himself into a God!

CAPTAIN SWING

Aye, he may well be... But the question remains how exactly do ye plan on stopping him?

NANCY VANDEVILLE

The only way we know how.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

We're organizing a pancake breakfast.

CAPTAIN SWING

Pancakes?

LEVADA RAYE

That's right, Captain. Pancakes.

CAPTAIN SWING

The dark prince's final endgame is revealed to you... And all you can think to do is fill your faces with pancakes?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

I'm also starting a letter writing campaign.

CAPTAIN SWING

Well, then... I didn't realize you were so serious. It's too bad you're out of doughnuts for the big push... I suppose I'll see the whole lot of ya in hell.

(Swing exits.)

NANCY VANDEVILLE

I do not like that man.

OUIDA MAE

Nobody likes that man.

REESE

Bastard, thinks he's the only one that ever read the Bible.

LEVADA RAYE

Are we out of doughnuts?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Surely not. Are we?

NANCY VANDEVILLE

I better check.

(She goes to check on doughnuts.)

REESE

Swing does have a point though.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

And what's that?

REESE

We're gonna need more than pancakes and postage to stop Armageddon.

LEVADA RAYE

Well you can count me in.

OUIDA MAE

I'll fight the devil, all the way to hell and back.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Any luck with those doughnuts, hon?

REESE

This isn't going to be easy.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

...I could have sworn we just had a half a dozen at least..

NANCY VANDEVILLE

No, we are out. And almost out of coffee creamer.

OUIDA MAE

That can't be.

REESE

Brother Vandeville I make a move that we reconvene Saturday morning for the pancake breakfast.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Any objections? -- No? Alright. Saturday morning, six a.m.

(They begin to exit)

NANCY VANDEVILLE

I'll put flyers up.

REESE

Ladies, we will discuss this later.

(Reese exits)

NANCY VANDEVILLE

What was that about?

LEVADA RAYE

Oh, nothing.

OUIDA MAE

Nancy, you just make the cutest little flyers! I can't wait to see them

LEVADA RAYE

She does! I wish I knew computers like you do.

NANCY VANDEVILLE

Oh, there's not much to it. I can show you how.

LEVADA RAYE

I'd be afraid I'd blow the thing up.

(The ladies exit still chattering)

(Brother Vandeville takes the opportunity to stretch out for a nap)

(Grayson enters)

GRAYSON

Dad, can I talk to you?

(Brother Vandeville wakes with a start)

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Well, son, I'm awfully busy today.

(MORE)

BROTHER VANDEVILLE (Continued)

I've got to meet with Decoration Day committee and the new youth pastor. And do some pre-marital counseling for... uh... somebody.

GRAYSON

Bill and Francine?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Sure.

GRAYSON

Oh.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

But, hey, how 'bout next week we go out for ice cream and then we can talk all you want.

GRAYSON

Well, Dad, I've just been kind of upset lately...

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Upset? Well... Ya know what makes an empty heart full again...

GRAYSON

Dad...

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Community service! I'll have Tonya call over to Decatur General. Nothing like seeing the sick and needy to make you feel better about your own life.

GRAYSON

Dad, I really don't think that...

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

And, you know, *Lisa Arnold* volunteers down there.

GRAYSON

Dad...

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

She's quite the catch. Comes from good parents... parents that put a *lot* of money into this church. You go down there, put in some volunteer hours and make her think you're a fine steward of the Christian faith and all that... That's how I met your mother. Volunteering is good for you, and... it makes the family look good.

GRAYSON

I just want to...

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Look, son, there's a lot of people out there that need help. My help. And those people indirectly sign my paycheck. It's not that you're less important, it's just that I don't have time for you and your problems right now. You're lucky. You've got a good family, food, shelter, and your health. God has blessed you with all of this, so, just... go over to the hospital and help the less fortunate. It'll be good for you.

GRAYSON

But...

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Grayson, I don't have time for this now. I have to schedule this pancake breakfast. Just go to the hospital and read some books to sick people that don't really care. If you're lucky, you might even meet a girl.

GRAYSON

Fine.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

And bring some of those macadamia nut cookies from the hospital eatery on your way out.

GRAYSON

Alright.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Say, son?

GRAYSON

Yeah?

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

How do you know about this Doctor Metternich?

GRAYSON

He came to our school a couple of times to talk.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

He came to your school?

GRAYSON

Well, yeah.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Why am I just hearing about this now?

GRAYSON

It wasn't a big deal.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Excuse me, mister? I'm just now being told that the spawn of Satan was allowed a free pass into the halls of education? They just let him fill young, impressionable minds with his nonsensical babble?

GRAYSON

He was just talking about being a scientist. He didn't say anything about God.

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Exactly.

GRAYSON

Dad, I really don't think he's...

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

Well, that's why you've got parents. You aren't old enough to think these things out for yourself.

GRAYSON

But, dad, I'm eighteen...

BROTHER VANDEVILLE

No. That's enough of that. You get to the hospital, and don't forget those cookies or your mother will be in a tizzy all week.

SCENE 2

INT. Decatur General Hospital

(Lisa Arnold, a young and attractive girl, flips through a magazine.)

(The phone rings a few times. She finally answers)

LISA

Decatur General Hospital... I'm not really sure... is she a patient here? ... What does she have?... it's just easier for me to remember people by diseases than by name... oh, *that* one... Was she the one that had the... yeah, I think she died... Oh wait, wait, wait... Was she the one with the arm infection too, or just the leg thingy?... Oh, yes. I think she probably died.

(She hangs up as casually as she answered)

LISA (Continued)

At least I hope she did.