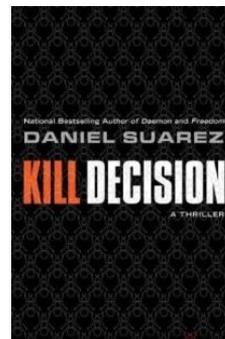# BOOK REVIEW

Kill Decision
By Daniel Suarez
New York, Dutton, 2012, 400 pp.
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It may seem strange that a novel, and a techno-thriller at that, would make the review pages of an academic journal. It is perhaps even stranger still that this particular piece of speculative (or not so speculative) fiction contains sophisticated intellectual discourse on such relatively obscure and disparate subjects as myrmecology (the study of ants), the manipulation of social media, autonomous robots, and twenty-first century warfare.

These are the literary devices that the author, and former systems consultant and software developer Daniel Suarez leverages. It is his purpose to entertain, but also to engage in a necessary and all-to relevant and contemporary discussion about the risks and possibilities that are inherent in much of the security technology that is currently deployed in both the domestic and international security environments. Imagine if you will, hordes of swarming, interconnected, autonomous and unattributable drones, armed and authorized to make critical decisions regarding the killing of human beings on the basis of parameters determined by an algorithm.

This is the world that *Kill Decision* inhibits, and it is Suarez at his best. His art, and his valuable contribution to intelligent security debates, which he has demonstrated in his two previous novels, is in taking his intimate technical knowledge of existing technology and combining plausible extrapolation with nefarious purposes. By painting a picture of the mass deployment of emerging technology, in such a believable and realistic setting, Suarez manages to discuss, in a more nuanced and realistic manner than much contemporary discourse, the dangers that may lie ahead if security technology continues its unfettered progress.

The author's use of relatively conventional literary devices, there is a love story layered within, allows the reader to become truly engaged and to connect with the characters, fostering a degree of identification, and in turn an interest in the outcome. As the two central characters battle unknown forces of evil, they face numerous ethical dilemmas, as well as being forced to confront an adaptive, hyper intelligent and evasive adversary. At its core, *Kill Decision* is the story of an academic who researches ants, and the special operations soldier who deems her survival to be central to the future of humanity, or at least to their remaining in the decision making loop when it relates to the killing of another human being.

While it is a novel, and ultimately science fiction, the existence of autonomous robots is a reality. As the author has stated at a TEDGlobal presentation in June 2013, in relation to the emergence of what is called *lethal autonomy*:

> . . .there's still a human in the loop to make that lethal firing decision, but it's not a technological requirement. It's a choice. . .because as we migrate lethal decision-making from humans to software, we risk not only taking the humanity out of war, but also changing our social landscape entirely, far from the battlefield.(Suarez, 2013)

Suarez's work presents a thrilling *Terminator*-esque fast-paced and entertaining read, but at the same time it should make all of us think deeply about the kind of future we want, and the price we are prepared to pay to achieve that ever nebulous concept of "security."

REFERENCE

Suarez, Daniel (2013). *The Kill Decision Shouldn't Belong to a Robot*. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_suarez_the_kill_decision

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