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Taking the Easy Route:

Warnings in Tobias S. Buckell's "Resistance"

In our world, advertisers and marketers use the information we provide through social media, our buying habits, and our searches to make decisions about what we might like. It's a growing field in research and marketing, and shows little signs of slowing down. In fact, very few laws in this country have been successful in curtailing this movement. However, this is something that has also been pushed by each of us as users. We want convenience, we want technology to take over the easy tasks, and we want to worry about the little things less. In reading Tobias S. Buckell's story "Resistance," it's clear there are a number of connections between his world and ours. Overall, like most humans we are all often seeking an easier route, and while in his story, that route had some protections built in, in our story it might not.

In the story, we learn that the society is set up as a techno-democracy where everyone must vote on everything. This caused problems and took a great deal of time: "Every minute everyone had to decide something. Pass a new law. Agree to send delegates to another station. Accept taxes. Divvy out taxes. Pay a bill. The stream of decisions became overwhelming, constantly popping up and requiring an electronic yes or no. And research was needed for each decision" (3-4). It's easy to understand how Pan came into being. In our society we have used robots and other machines to do physical work for us for years. Now we are working toward

machines that can do thinking for us, in fact we already have machines that can do advanced computations, and in the near future, many, if not all, of us may be moving around in driverless cars—machines that take the guesswork out of driving. We do this because there are many other things this frees us up to do, and we know there are advantages in terms of efficiency and safety.

Another example of similarities between our world and the world that Buckell has created is the backbone of how our information is disseminated. With things like Facebook, Instagram, and other points of information, it's not hard for a computer to come up with our general likes and dislikes. In the case of "Resistance," the citizens of this space station had the same kinds of technologies and used them to take over voting:

“The artificial intelligence modelers came up with our solution. They created intelligences that would vote just as you would if you had the time to do nothing but focus on voting.” They weren't real artificial intelligences. The modelers took your voting record, and paired it to your buying habits, social habits, and all the other aspects of your life that were tracked in modern life to model your habits. After all, if a bank could use a financial profile to figure out if an unusual purchase didn't reflect the buyer's habits and freeze an account for safety reasons, why couldn't the same black box logic be applied to a voter's patterns? (4)

We also use things like this so that we don't have to think about many of the simple basic tasks in life. Our smartphones remember phone numbers for us, they give us directions, and they remind us to take out the trash. We do this so that we can take shortcuts and have the

computers do it for us. We accept that many platforms offer us recommendations, but we rarely think about the fact that these are based on our past viewing, shopping, or visiting habits.

In short, both we and the citizens of the space station want the easy answer. We want to take a pill and be immediately cured. We want to do one exercise and have the perfect body. We want to watch the video and have all the education. Yet we can't. When we stop participating in our lives not simply on a physical level, but also on an intellectual level by making decisions about our government and our society, we lose much of our humanity. In comparing our society to Buckell's in "Resistance," there are similarities. In their world, it took the algorithm taking over, to make them value what they had given up and previously shunned. How far we will go in letting computers, whether intelligent or not, take over our decisions and lives, is not clear. However, what is clear, is that we are on the way there, much like the residents of the space station, because we are overwhelmed and overburdened. The question is whether we will discover that we do not want that easy route because of the cost to our freedoms, or if we'll adopt it and give up our independence for convenience.

Work Cited

Buckell, Tobias S. "Resistance." *Seeds of Change*. John Joseph Adams, ed., Accessed 5 Mar. 2019, <http://www.johnjosephadams.com/seeds-of-change/contents/resistance-by-tobias-s-buckell/>.