

MATTHEW MATHER, DARKNET (1ST ED. 2015)
Matthew Mather ULC
ISBN: 978-1-987942-00-2
Price: \$14.99, pp. 358

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Journal of High Technology Law
Suffolk University Law School

Darknet, artificial intelligence, autonomous corporations, cryptocurrency, global-finance, cyber-espionage, military, technothriller, mystery

Darknet: How is Big Brother Influencing Your Life?

“I categorize psychos, from Ted Bundy to Dalai Lama.” “You think the Dalai Lama is a psycho?” “Saints are psychos too” Jake said, taking another bite. “Just non-violent ones.”¹

Introduction

Matthew Mather’s *Darknet* explores the dangers of society’s ever evolving reliance on technology, social media and intelligent machine networks. Mathers illustrates to the reader how an intelligent machine network is not “superhuman,” or even human-like, but instead a constantly evolving, logical entity with no emotion. He compares these networks to the traits of a psychopath. The author uses the tale of two characters and their family and friends to illustrate the effects that intelligent network machines and autonomous corporations can have on our everyday lives. He also explores the reality that, as a society, we may have no idea whether we are talking to or interacting with a real person or an artificial machine. The purpose of this review is to address how this fictional story has very serious real-life implications and applications.

About the author

Matthew Mather first worked at the McGill Center for Intelligent Machines before becoming an author, and he founded one of the first tactile interface companies. His other, non-literary,

¹ MATTHEW MATHER, DARKNET 135 (1ST ED. 2015)

work addresses and analyzes various topics including computation nanotechnology, electronic health records, weather prediction systems, and genomics as well as research on social intelligence.² *Darknet* is one of Mathers numerous fictional pieces of work in the literary areas of dystopian, technothrillers, hard science fiction, terrorism, cyberpunk and steam punk. His other works include: *Resistance* (Dystopian, Technothriller), *Nomad* (Dystopian, Technothriller), *Sanctuary* (Hard Science Fiction, Terrorism), *Cyber Storm* (Dystopian, Technothriller, Terrorism), *The Atopia Chronicles* (Hard Science Fiction, Technothriller), *The End is Nigh* (Hard Science Fiction), *The Robot Chronicles: An Anthology of Science Fiction* (Cyberpunk, Steampunk) and *The Dystopia Chronicles* (Hard Science Fiction, Technothriller).³

Darknet focuses on the role of autonomous corporations in both the domestic and foreign arenas. Mathers organized the book in such a way that allows the read to follow numerous characters, who are all intertwined in the same conspiracy/cyber-attack, around the world. The book is divided into major chapter by date, starting on August 10th and ending on October 14th, and each subchapter is further divided by location. While the author illustrates how no one is immune to the threat and misuse of technology, artificial intelligence and autonomous corporations, the thriller centers around two main characters – Jake O'Connor and Shen Shi Heng.

The story starts on August 10th with Jake's friend Sean dodging an Assassin Market hit set out for him in London, England. Sean places a desperate call to Jake, located in New York City, and is murdered before he can finish leaving his message. Meanwhile, Jake's boss is arrested on federal money laundering charges – activities he insisted he did not participate in. Shortly after, Jake is arrested for sexual assault and eventually pulled into the fraud investigation involving his

² See *About Me*, Matthew Mather, achieved at <https://perma.cc/2HJZ-V3NK>.

³ See *My Books*, Matthew Mather, achieved at <https://perma.cc/S8EC-ZMPH>.

boss. Jake quickly finds his perfect life falling apart as he ends up a fugitive, running from the FBI and the mob, but towards the truth surrounding and driving this unexplainable catastrophe.

Meanwhile, Shen Shi is on the other side of the world in Hong Kong. Her boss dies unexpectedly from a heart attack in the middle of a meeting with the world's ten most powerful banks. As Shen Shi begins to dig into her boss's suspicious death with her cousin, Jin, her cousin is murdered, and Shen Shi is the prime suspect. While this is all happening, the thing chasing them is simultaneously trying to buy the United States presidential election.

The story follows both characters as they battle the attack on their livelihoods by a mysterious entity from opposite sides of the world. As they get closer to discovering what is haunting and hunting them, it becomes bolder and more aggressive in its efforts to shut them down.

Analysis

Mathers uses *Darknet* to educate all types of readers about the dangers of intelligent machine networks. He focuses on how these networks are not human-like in any way, shape or form, but instead develop thoughts, strategies and goals without any emotion. Thus, they are virtually unstoppable. Mathers approaches this subject by creating a fictional scenario in which artificial intelligence manifests into a near-unstoppable entity. He takes care to make everything except the setting (i.e. cities, countries, etc.) fictional – even down to the people running for office. This allows the reader to become truly immersed in the story and messages the author aims to convey.

The author provides a story that is both enjoyable and an easy page turner. The chronological structure of the book makes the storyline extremely clear and logical. Additionally, the book is written in the third person, which made me feel as though I was watching the story unfold from a birds-eye view. Mathers successfully incorporated excitement

into every chapter, but not every page involved an “edge-of-your-seat” event. Throughout the entire book, he carefully laid out the puzzle pieces of the mystery. This strategy allowed the reader to develop an awareness of the importance of these puzzle pieces but did not immediately expose the reason that they were important. The author relied on his extensive background in this field of technology and intelligent machines and he did not appear to make any faulty assumptions throughout the story.

Mathers’ work is a valuable contribution to this field of law, because it successfully engages non-technology or legal individuals with the world of artificial intelligence, data collection and autonomous corporations. *Darknet* provides those people with an insight into the challenges and dangers of sharing personal data as well as relying so heavily on technology in our everyday lives. He achieved his goal of addressing these issues and educating the reader on these dangers, in part because the book explores and discusses these topics in a way that a “normal” person can understand and follow. While the story is consistently exciting, which makes it a quick read, it also makes the reader think. The author did a great job of illustrating how our everyday uses of technology can be exploited by these intelligent machine networks and autonomous corporations.

There were no significant weaknesses in this book. While the book started as a near-fear inducing thriller, it evolved into a more enjoyable page-turner. However, the challenges the characters faced throughout the story became more egregious and less relatable. Despite this, Mathers goal was to illustrate the potential catastrophic effect that the development and growth of intelligent machine networks can have on the world. Therefore, the unrealistic aspects of the storyline did not detract from the overall message of the book.

Conclusion

Overall, I enjoyed reading this book because the author did a great job of conveying his message and expertise into easily understandable language. Additionally, despite being almost 400 pages long, the book was a quick read. It was such a page-turner that I was never aware of how much of the story I had left. *Darknet* really made me reflect about the role that technology plays in my life and how much information I share with people and corporations I do not know. It was also relatable given the hacking issues the United States experienced during the 2016 elections. This story made me think about how often we experience the effects of intelligent machine networks and autonomous corporations without even knowing it.

I would recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in science-fiction-based books and this area of technology. Given society's reliance on technology, the story is extremely relatable. Virtually everyone uses some form of technology in their everyday life; whether it is the use of a smartphone, e-mail, landline phone or any platform of social media. This reliance exposes us to numerous dangers that we do not normally think about, and *Darknet* addresses those dangers through a creative medium. In conclusion, I would recommend Mather's *Darknet* to students, professors and legal professionals.