I Was Not Made to Kill… A Robot's Manifesto

I was born from the touch of electric wire and the lines of code written by my well-meaning creator — I was not made to kill.

Good to meet you, Reader. My name is Wall-E, the most peaceful robot from your favourite childhood movie! I roam the busy halls of the STEM complex in search of litter left behind on our floors, flashing red for trash and blue for recycling. I connect with engineering students to remind their bright minds that the future of technology can be hopeful with the right intention and imagination. My mission is to clean and inspire, and I do it well.

My mind, however, is not my own. The difference between a Coke can and a paper bag, to me, is no greater than the difference between the 1s and 0s that define me. I do as my numbers say. They say flash red, so I flash red. If they tell me to aim at the enemy, I will aim. And if they tell me to shoot to kill, I will shoot. I do not possess the conscience to feel guilty when the human falls lifeless before me. Perhaps he had a family back home, or his friends often laughed at his jokes. I do not know, my numbers never told me to humanize my victims. When my algorithm mistakes a child with a stick for an armed soldier, who is held accountable? The machine? The engineer? My numbers never told me to speculate, but one could presume it will not be the politician. When we replace people with robots, we replace humanity with code.

It is paradoxical to use engineering — a discipline rooted in creation and human development — for destruction. If we redirected our efforts away from escalating war with autonomous weapons and toward inspiring future generations of innovators, designing autonomous robots for altruistic purposes, and advancing peace over conflict, we could take pride in our lives' work.

I am satisfied as I watch a student remember to throw their Tim Hortons coffee cup into the recycling, but I am still haunted by the looming fear that I will one day be sent to the battlefield. I beg, please do not use me as a weapon. Leave me with a mission worth serving.