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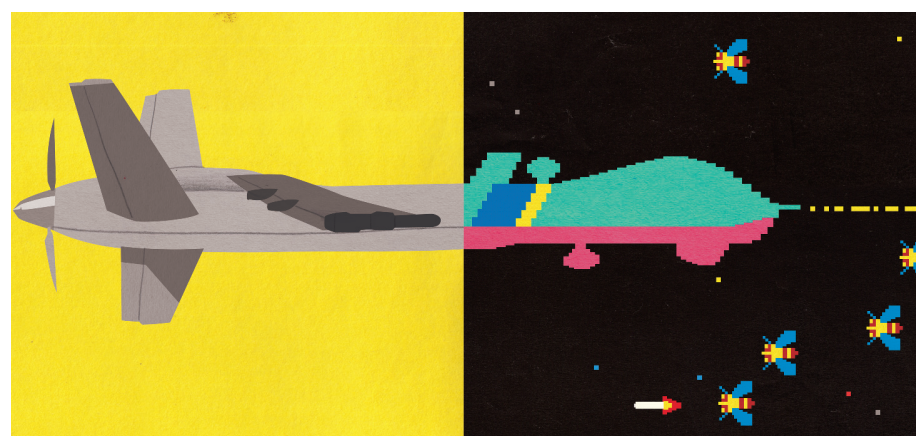


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DRONE ON THE RANGE

**Should Oregon skies welcome
unmanned aerial vehicles?**

By Camilla Mortensen

It's a bird! It's a plane! What is that thing swooping through the Oregon skies?

It's not the May 21st Rapture — no planes are needed for that — but something strange might be flying through Oregon's atmosphere with a proposed new drone testing area on the state's east side. Unmanned aerial vehicles can be as small and virtually undetectable as an insect or a hummingbird (and look disturbingly like one) while the Predator drones being used by the Pentagon in Afghanistan and Pakistan are full-size airplanes armed with deadly missiles.

If the thought of micro-spy planes disguised as pretty birds or of giant unmanned flying robots shooting people creeps you out, you are not alone. A British Ministry of Defence study on the ethics of drones in the military released in April says the robotic vehicles have the potential to begin an "incremental and involuntary journey towards a Terminator-like reality."

Jean Aguerre of Not 1 More Acre, who has been fighting the establishment of the world's largest joint forces future combat systems training area stretching from Colorado into New Mexico, says when it comes to remote control warfare, "The technological genie is already out of the ethical bottle."

The British report was ordered by officials concerned about the growing controversy over the use of drones against insurgents in Afghanistan and Pakistan — a controversy incited by the U.S., although Aguerre and others say the U.S. has avoided dealing with the ethical issues of high-tech warfare, concentrating instead on the profit to American industry. "Is this the road to perpetual war because it's so profitable?" Aguerre asks. She adds that "robotic warfare is the most expensive weapon systems ever designed and built."

The drone attacks have not slowed down in the aftermath of the killing of Osama bin

Laden in Pakistan. That mission against the al Qaeda leader was manned, though drones were debated as an option. Ironically, a free computer videogame emulating the mission, "Bin Laden Raid," came out only a week after his assassination.

The British report goes on to say, "It is essential that before unmanned systems become ubiquitous (if it is not already too late) ... we ensure that, by removing some of the horror, or at least keeping it at a distance, we do not risk losing our controlling humanity and make war more likely."

If senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and some folks from Economic Development for Central Oregon (EDCO) have their way, and the FAA reauthorization bill is signed into law with an increase in drone-testing areas inserted, then a swath of Oregon's high desert, currently home to sage grouse and antelope, could become prime real estate for drones or more accurately, unmanned aerial vehicles, also called unmanned aerial systems (UAS).

Drone zone advocates see the testing area as a way to bring money and business back to Oregon, and the pro-drone contingent says that the planes will benefit everyone from unemployed aviation industry workers to lost hikers. But drone drawbacks include not only potential effects on Oregon's wild lands, but ethical considerations as well. As war becomes more and more like a high tech video game, the question becomes: Does Oregon want to be in the business of testing killing machines?

UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES

A typical "drone," says Oregon State University professor Belinda Batten, is a big plane requiring a bunch of people to remotely pilot it.