

Preface

“Here be monsters.”

Monsters still exist, though perhaps not the types depicted on charts drawn by early cartographers for ancient mariners. Those warnings, sometimes accompanied by the word *monstra*, Latin for monster, likely represented maritime hazards, but the idea of monsters and hazards beyond the horizon has stayed with us. And where there are monsters, there are those who rise up to slay them.

In a 1993 interview speaking about the film adaptation of his novel *Jurassic Park*, a reflection on the delusion of scientific control, author Michael Crichton said: “Biotechnology and genetic engineering are very powerful...The film suggests that [science’s] control of nature is elusive. And just as war is too important to leave to the generals, science is too important to leave to scientists. Everyone needs to be attentive.”

As with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Michael Crichton was issuing a warning through the medium of popular fiction. It is a warning we have yet to heed. Both authors explore ethics, power and nature through the lens of scientific achievement and ambition, and of advances in science deceiving us into thinking we have control. This book explores those ideas considered within the framework of emerging technologies as applied to next-generation warfare. There are hazards on the horizon.

Wars are not fought by computers or genetically engineered autonomous machines. Not yet, anyway. Technology and equipment play a supporting role in warfare as evidenced by our experience in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Though limited engagements at the outset, all three became protracted military conflicts that can best be described as evolving, or devolving, into expeditionary counterinsurgency campaigns. Wars, at least at the time of this writing, are still fought by human beings, and as we can all attest, human beings are inherently flawed.

“The war to end all wars” wasn’t, though it did end empires. World War I led us to the most destructive war yet just over twenty years later. The firebombings of Hamburg, Dresden and Tokyo were precursors to the ultimate expression of technological dominance the world has ever witnessed with the dropping of two atomic weapons on Japan.

We have only progressed in our capacity for destruction since.

The National Security Act of 1947 changed the Department of War to the National Military Establishment which was then renamed the more innocuous Department of Defense in 1949. Ironically, since its renaming, the National Military Establishment has been less about defense and more about war. The ensuing Cold War saw a buildup of arsenals capable of destroying not just the adversary but the world. The end of that war was but the start of another. The machine was hungry. It remains so.

The World Economic Forum tells us we are on the verge of a Fourth Industrial Revolution. Klaus Schwab, its founder and executive chairman, writes that the next Industrial Revolution “is evolving at an exponential rather than a linear pace. The possibilities of billions of people connected by mobile devices, with unprecedented processing power, storage capacity, and access to knowledge, are unlimited. And these possibilities will be multiplied by emerging technology breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, and quantum computing...governments will gain new technological powers to

increase their control over populations, based on pervasive surveillance systems and the ability to control digital infrastructure.”

We would be wise to remember that a society’s primary organizing principle is its monopoly on force, its ability to control its populace and export violence in the form of war.

The day may come when autonomously controlled surface, subsurface and aerial vehicles powered by sentient quantum computers make the decisions and fight our wars, when the very combatants themselves are a fusion of artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, advanced robotics, biotechnologies, and nanotechnologies. That day is not today, though it is getting closer. Today, war remains the most primal of experiences, managed and fought by flawed human beings at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. It still comes down to a single combatant holding a weapon, off safe, finger on the trigger, applying pressure to the rear. That person behind the rifle is the final decision maker in a chain of decision makers spanning continents and even generations. On the other side is a combatant also sent into the foxhole by flawed human beings. Their weapon is off safe as well. They are aligning the sights. Their finger is on the trigger. They are applying pressure. None of the geopolitics matter when you are looking down the glass against an enemy doing the same, and it is not always the best man who walks away.

Will that one day change? Perhaps. Will technology come to either deter or win the day in the future, autonomous machines fighting each other over land, resources, data, and control?

It’s possible.

Until it does, we best keep our powder dry.

The topics I explore in my writing mirror a world that for a time I was honored to inhabit, that of special operators, intelligence analysts, paramilitary officers, contractors and staff from what was then called the Special Activities Division of the CIA. My interest in what John le Carré termed the “secret world” began with my earliest memories as I watched the events of the Iranian Hostage Crisis unfold on television and in newspapers and magazines in November 1979. What happens in the secret world is often mirrored in fiction and what happens in fiction can at times be mirrored in the secret world. History is foundational to both.

The universe James Reece inhabits in the pages of my novels is fictitious, though there are whispers of truth. At times those whispers grow to roars. Other times they are so soft they go unheard. This novel, like those that precede it, holds a light to the secret world, briefly illuminating the shadows. It is a world that few will touch or experience, a world that exists so far beneath the surface of what most consider “normal life” that they believe it to be the vision of novelists and screenwriters. But it does exist. I’ve seen it, albeit only for a moment. Then, for me too, the light faded. I moved on to my next assignment and eventually into the private sector to devote myself to writing in the next chapter of my life. But I never forgot.

At times I’ve felt the pull to return, to return to a life where every breath was sacred because of a constant awareness that it could be my last. As time ticks by, I feel that pull less and less. Perhaps that is because my mission of caring for my family and my passion for writing and history have combined to give me purpose.

But, sometimes on a cold fall evening, as the sun sinks below the horizon and the sky turns brilliant shades of red, I remember that there is another world out there, a world in

shadow. A world where men and women of the world's various intelligence services are vying for secrets, searching out their next targets and sometimes preparing to kill.

The espionage, intelligence, special operations, and terrorism I write about have yet to fade from my memory. I hold a magnifying glass to them for the time you spend in the story. Then they are gone. But perhaps parts will stay with you as did passages, themes and lessons from the books that shaped me.

My previous novels have explored themes of revenge, redemption, the dark side of man, the lessons of war, forgiveness, and truth and consequences. Though this book certainly focuses to the rapidly expanding role of technology in conflict, at its base this is a story about loyalty.

Will James Reece continue to serve a nation so at odds with its own foundational principles? Can he continue to fight for a country that squandered so many lives over a twenty-year war and seemed unable, year after year, to understand the nature of the conflict to which its elected representatives were committing America's sons and daughters?

Where can he go? Where can any of us go? There is no New World for which to sail.

Klaus Schwab continues his essay on the Fourth Industrial Revolution stating, "Modern conflicts involving states are increasingly 'hybrid' in nature, combining traditional battlefield techniques with elements previously associated with nonstate actors. The distinction between war and peace, combatant and noncombatant, and even violence and nonviolence (think cyberwarfare) is becoming uncomfortably blurry."

Which brings us back to the warnings of Shelly and Crichton.

Remember, "Here be monsters."

Jack Carr
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