

The Wave of The Future may be war without end: Q&A with Novelist Duane De Mello

by

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“Alone in his car he felt like he was in a place that was far away. He was totally on his own and moving into a preparatory stage for determining how he would conduct himself in getting another operation underway. He felt good going into this frame of mind once again. It provided him with warmth and secure feeling. This was the ambush hunter preparing to give chase and go after his prey – in this case, and much like the terrorists he sought, he would take the initiative in knowing how he would attack, where he would attack and when he would attack. Concealed by his cover, he would move into his setup position of disrupting and defeating a terrorist group bent on their waging of jihad.” (Duane De Mello, *The Wave of The Future*, 2010)

As critic Mark T. Hooker has demonstrated so clearly in his reviews here at Spywise.net, the most prevalent sub-genre of 21st Century spy literature is that of “insider fiction,” that is, novels crafted by former intelligence officers. In some cases, the books are merely a means to use expertise to create entertaining yarns with a certain degree of verisimilitude; others are cautionary tales warning us of what might happen and how we need prepare for what hostile forces have in mind in the current geopolitical climate.

Duane De Mello’s January 2010 *The Wave of The Future* is clearly of the latter school. As the title implies, De Mello is concerned about how present day dynamics and circumstances might lead to disasters if our vigilance isn’t of the highest level, if we’re not willing to put security ahead of some personal rights, if intelligence agencies don’t function to their fullest capacity, and, as many others have noted, if these agencies don’t grow up and put aside inter-departmental bickerings and one-upmanship. In fact, *The Wave of The Future* has an instructional tone with more than realistic content that is chilling not because of the dramatics but because of the more than plausible events in which, unlike most similar novels, the heroes are not always the victors.

On one level, *The Wave of The Future* often reads more like journalism than fiction with extremely detailed insights into how modern intelligence officers must operate. The book is the other side of law enforcement procedural dramas where we watch the steps detectives must take to solve crimes already committed. In books like *Wave*, we experience the processes undercover agents must follow to avert criminal activity including crafty infiltration, sophisticated surveillance, and analytical connecting of the dots that link the plans and plots of terrorists. Perhaps this is both the book’s greatest strength and weakness—readers will not find memorable characters carefully drawn with vivid back-stories. Instead, we are looking at types who represent the men and women of both good and evil. On one side, we watch undercover agents in the field drawing on their own resources, skills, and motivations. The same is true of the other side—modern

terrorists often have precisely the same resources and skills if far different motivations for causing us harm. The realm of such espionage is just as murky and nasty as any Cold War duels, likely far more dangerous than old spies planting bugs in each other's embassies.

In one sense, *The Wave of The Future* can be read as necessary medicine lacking a candy-coating. Still, the book is hard to put down because every page reads like an honest, balanced speculation based on the wisdom only experience can fairly provide. It's a world in whichever side you're on, the victories are short-lived in a war without any foreseeable ending.

To dig deeper into how this novel was created, what author Duane De Mello intended, and what new readers might expect from what this debut novelist has to say, Spywise.net posed a number of questions to the author. We think the interview alone will be educational for those wondering what changes are taking place in 21st Century intelligence agencies.

Q: First, can you tell us a bit about your background?

A: I am a writer, educator, businessperson, and former CIA operations officer. After receiving a master's degree at Stanford University, I wrote my first book, *The McCarthy Era: 1950-1954*, while teaching high school in Cupertino, California. After serving two tours in Vietnam as a civilian advisor for the U.S. Department of the Army, I stayed on in Asia for two decades working in Hong Kong, the Philippines and Japan. Returning to the U.S. and managing a laser and sensor technology firm in southern California, I sought a return to working overseas. Hence, I turned to the CIA, became an operations officer, and travelled extensively throughout the Middle East, Europe and the former Soviet Union. I am now retired and live with my wife along the Potomac River in southern Maryland where I am working on another novel.

Q: In your book, it's clear that you're drawing from either detailed research or field experience. What situations come from your time in the agency?

A: As a field operations officer, aka case officer, the events in the book are based upon a combination of my own personal experiences and a heady dose of fiction written to suit particular locales and situations. For example, the extensive use of details to describe surveillance techniques and manner of operating in various environments is quite accurate. Operating under any kind of cover requires extreme caution, before, during and after meetings with agents, potential agents, etc., in order to preserve the operational security of any given relationship or action being taken. A few of the characters and some of the places and situations are indeed drawn from my memories of colleagues, places and situations I found myself in while working operationally. In order to portray a realistic looking person or situation, however, I did embellish the images of some of the characters as part of the element of style I bring to my writing.

Q: Speaking of writing style, what other authors influenced you? In many ways, your emphasis on operational procedures seemed to be a response to so many other books heavy on action and character, not so much reality-based situations and incidents.

A: While I have my own list of authors whose writings I enjoy reading, I have tried to generate my own style that, in the case of *The Wave of The Future*, is heavy on the details of what an intelligence officer goes through working operationally. If anything, I purposely wanted the use of details to border on the pedantic. I also believe that some of the insider information I provide on various internal workings of the Agency goes a long way to establish my own bona fides as someone knowing what intelligence is all about.

Q: One emphasis in your book is on the use of NOCs, operatives with Non Official Cover. What is their main usefulness in the field?

A: In today's world of trying to successfully and securely conduct intelligence operations, the world of the Internet and the latest technological equipment for collection purposes has, for a good part of an operations officers work, made him/her obsolete. The NOC, however, utilizing some form of cover, such as a businessperson, for example, is in a much better position to securely conduct operational tasks while maintaining a high degree of personal and operational security. Such covered officers, operating alone as singletons, are also able to utilize secure communication devices and are, in effect, one-person stations able to function anywhere in the world.

Q: Many of your character descriptions read like dossiers rather than fictionalized portraits. Was this intentional, to have a straight forward reporting approach rather than a Robert Ludlum style of killers on every corner and speeding car chases?

A: This reflects my own straightforward, rather lean approach towards character development. I realize it may be somewhat sparse, and it may be necessary to avoid such in future writings, but at this early stage in writing novels, I do not wish to embellish or be overly descriptive.

Q: The first half of your book is parallel storylines, jumping back and forth between the Jihadists and those hunting them. Was this to demonstrate some sort of balance between the skills and motivations of both the hunters and hunted?

A: I was trying to show how both the hunters and the Jihadists go about conducting their lives in the pursuit of their end goals. I did seek to have a balance in their skills and motivations. Could I have erred in trying to achieve that balance? Was it even necessary? Did I develop my characters to a sufficient degree? These are the kinds of answers I seek from reviews of the book before I begin work on the sequel.

Q: At one point in the story, you wrote:

“The successful practice of espionage, Mitch learned when dealing with agents and targets of interest, is to make glory of vice. If you can't cheat, lie,

steal, bribe, suborn, burglarize, mislead, seduce, blackmail and kill successfully, you are in the wrong business. Manipulating the agent, by whatever means possible, is standard practice. But being manipulated by your superiors instead, left Mitch feeling used and dangling on the end of a line.”

What were you trying to say about the duels between agents and their superiors, not to mention the consequences of inter-agency turf wars?

A: My statement here is a no-holds barred statement of what comprises the intelligence game. It is not pretty, but it is the way to succeed, when necessary. In terms of the manipulation between, for example, case officers and their superiors, I always felt we were better practicing the “code of the hills.” In other words, for people working together within a service, do not play the player. In *The Wave*, Mitch found himself manipulated. He should have been brought up to speed and told what was going to happen before the act of betrayal took place. He is a big boy and is prepared to adjust to the situation if his superiors deal with him fairly. He was not, and he therefore questions his future by continuing to play outside the code. The inter-agency turf wars are something else, including dealing with friendly liaison services. It is a human specie issue where inflated egos still abound.

Q: The title of your book implies you have a specific point or two to make. What do you see in the future for intelligence agencies?

A: For many years inside the Agency, new recruits for operations officer ranks that were selected to become NOCs were told they would become the wave of the future – namely, because they would operate alone on the outside compared to inside ops officers. A NOC can blend in more securely when operating in an open milieu and, in effect, hide in the open. Freedom of action is enhanced significantly. On the Jihadist side though, as Mitch, Jack and the FBI officers found out during the jailhouse encounter with Wahid in Alexandria, Va., Wahid, with two successful terrorist attacks under his belt, was confidently able to tell them that these acts of jihad will now become the wave of the future for infidels the world over. For intelligence services and governments in the future, my outlook, while grim remains one of constant vigilance, remaining on the offensive, the employment of the latest in technological advances, and the extensive practice at border crossing locations as well as cities throughout the world of behavior pattern recognition techniques. We, as citizens will feel what we perceive as the loss of some of our democratic freedoms. However, we will learn to learn to live with such situations after a few successes against major Jihadist terrorist attacks. If we do not give up some, in order to gain a lot, as far as I am concerned, the future does not look good. I am a born optimist, and I find it difficult to accept such predicaments.

Q: On that same line, while we don't want to give the ending away, the book doesn't end with the usual rousing successful blocking of a terrorist attack. In fact, you presented two episodes in the “War on Terror” in which the good guys don't achieve their goals. Why?

A: The two successful Jihadist terrorist attacks in the book serve to send a message. Wake up, enhance and improve security practices at key installations and event locations around the world, or be faced with more to come at the hands of the Jihadists. They are well up to the task of improving their capabilities to further strike fear and create panic in the populace. On an endnote, I wanted to somewhat portray Mitch as a victim in that he still will move forward and remain dedicated to his Agency work in the future. However, he is now jaded and hurt by the perceived betrayal, but will press ahead in a sequel to come wherein he will be a much stronger and forceful character.

For more information on *The Wave of The Future* and how to obtain your copy, check out—

www.ecampus.com/book/9781439260098 -