



The Terminal Man

Michael Crichton

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With his second novel, The Terminal Man, Michael Crichton opened up a new area of modern science for his fans: surgical-electronic mind control--a form of behavior control that has become a key scientific and moral issue of our time. Crichton takes it out of the realm of the abstract and makes immediate its workings, its dangers, and its implications, in a novel that provides urgent information.

The Terminal Man Details

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Author : Michael Crichton

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From Reader Review The Terminal Man for online ebook

Jonathan says

I had high hopes for this book after reading Crichton's 'The Andromeda Strain.' I thought it would be another techno-thriller with the same kind of intriguing ideas and medical realism that would make the plot believable and far-fetched at the same time. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Perhaps the book is dated in the sense that a man receiving brain implants and receiving shocks in order to stimulate the brain is no longer science-fiction and rather is a reality of today's medicine. Furthermore, the ideas of a war between man and machine are standard Hollywood staples nowadays.

The book sorely lacks characterization and some of the main character's motivations are completely unbelievable. These paper-thin characters are constantly comparing man to computers and are constantly day-dreaming about the ways in which man and machine are the same. Even if I try and place myself in the early 1970's (when the book was published) and pretend that the comparison of man to a computer is a new and exciting revelation I would still have a problem with the ham-fisted ways that Crichton goes about comparing man and machine. Frequently characters refer to thinking as 'processing' and there are several other instances of these obvious comparisons.

The paper-thin characters would be more forgivable if the book had a strong-plot. I didn't start reading a Michael Crichton book expecting strong characterization; I was expecting a page turner with under-developed but mostly-believable larger than life characters. It fell short in every way. The weak characters were not compensated with an exciting plot. I found myself bored almost the entire way through. Usually with page-turners the plot engages you so much that you are swept up by it and distracts you from the weak characterization, but the weak story just highlighted all of the book's other faults.

The plot itself is somewhat ridiculous and the story basically becomes a killer on the loose story. (Don't worry I haven't revealed any more than the book jacket itself). If you look at the book as a killer-thriller it is still boring and clumsily written. Due to the killer's medical condition it diffuses the killer's responsibility and therefore takes all of the emotion out of the book. It becomes a hackneyed morality play in which it could be argued that the doctors are more responsible for the murders than the murderer himself.

Without revealing any specifics, the book culminates in such an unbelievably contrived and easily foreseeable (so foreseeable that the killer himself predicts the ending about 60 pages before it happens), that when it ends you find yourself turning the page and expecting another chapter to add some sort of originality or real meaning to the book.

The ending is so bad that you wish you could unread the last chapter and leave it as a 'bad book that may at least have a fun ending.' But the ending is so stupid and contrived that it is laughable.

This was one of the worst books that I have ever read. It made me wonder if Crichton had to write this quickly to bank in on the success of The Andromeda Strain.

Anyhow, when I read 'The Andromeda Strain' I thought that I might buy a few more Crichton books to have for rainy days when I just want an easy, fun book. The Terminal Man has made me seriously question Crichton's ability. I will probably read Jurassic Park someday as it is known as one of his better books, but I certainly won't think of Crichton as a reliable author.

Don't read The Terminal Man. There are so many good books in this world- more good reads than you can read in a lifetime. Don't waste your time on this one.

Donovan says

I really enjoy Crichton's work and the immersive environments he creates and the hard-science edge he adopts. This is no different in that respect. It moves along at comfortable pace and I found myself going through it quite quickly. A great work that once again explores morality combined with science. A recommended read for the sci-fi/thriller fan.

Plot *Spoilers*****

Harry Benson, a man in his 30s, suffers from psychomotor epilepsy. He often has seizures followed by blackouts, and then wakes up hours later with no knowledge of what he has done. During one of his seizures he severely beats two people. He is a prime candidate for an operation to implant electrodes and minicomputer in his brain to control the seizures. Surgeons John Ellis and Morris are to perform the surgery, which is unprecedented for the time. In modern medicine, such a device would be called a brain pacemaker. The ramifications of the procedure are questioned by psychiatrist Janet Ross, and by an emeritus professor named Manon at the lecture about the surgery. Manon raises concerns that Benson is psychotic (pointing to Benson's adamant belief that there is no difference between man and machine) and the crimes he commits during the blackouts won't be curtailed. Ellis admits that what they are doing isn't a cure but just a way to stimulate the brain when the computer senses a seizure coming on. It would prevent a seizure but not cure his personality disorder. Despite the concerns voiced, the team decides to go ahead with the operation.

The operation implants forty electrodes in Benson's brain, controlled by a small computer that is powered by a plutonium power pack in his shoulder. Benson must wear a dog tag that says to call the University Hospital if he is injured, as his atomic power pack might emit radiation. While he is recovering, a woman named Angela Black gives Morris a wig for Benson, whose head was shaved prior to the operation.

Morris goes back to his normal work, where he interviews a man who volunteers to have electrodes put into his mind to stimulate pleasure. Morris refuses him, but realizes that people like Benson could potentially become addicts. He recalls a Norwegian man, who was allowed to stimulate himself as much as he wanted, and did so much that it actually gave him brain damage.

McPherson, head of the Neuropsychiatric department, interviews Benson, who is still convinced machines are taking over the world. McPherson realizes Manon and Ross were right and orders nurses to administer thiorazine to Benson.

After resting for a day, Benson goes through "interfacing". The forty electrodes in his brain are activated by computer technician Gerhard, one by one, to see which ones would stop a seizure. Each produces different results. One of the electrodes stimulates a sexual pleasure. Ross asks Gerhard to monitor Benson.

Gerhard shows his findings to Ross, who realizes that the seizures are getting more frequent. She explains that Benson is learning to initiate seizures involuntarily because the result of these seizures is a shock of pleasure, which leads to him having more frequent seizures. Ross checks on Benson, and discovers that, due to a clerical error, Benson has not been receiving his thiorazine. She then finds out that Benson has escaped from the hospital.

Ross goes to Benson's house, but finds two girls instead who say he has a gun and blueprints for the basement of University Hospital (where the computer mainframe is). Ellis searches at a strip club where Benson, who is fascinated with all things sexual, spends a lot of time. He doesn't find him. Morris goes to his job, and meets Benson's boss who said that Benson feared the University Hospital because of its ultra-modern computer system, an upgraded IBM System/360

Ross is contacted by Anders, a policeman who found Benson's dogtag at the murder scene of Angela Black.

After answering questions at the police station, Ross goes home. Benson arrives at her house, and has a seizure, which causes him to attack Ross. Ross manages to turn on her microwave, which disrupts the atomic pacemaker in his shoulder. He runs away. Ross goes back to the hospital and goes to sleep.

When Angela Black is brought back to the hospital for autopsy, pathologists find a book of matches that have the name of an airport. Morris goes to this airport, and a bartender says he saw Benson an hour ago leaving with Joe, who took him to the hangar. Morris goes to this hangar and finds Joe severely beaten. He is in turn attacked by Benson, who smashes the lower part of his face in with a steel pipe and then flees.

Ross, back at the hospital, is awakened by Gerhard. She has a call from Benson. When Anders traces the call he realizes that Benson is inside the hospital. Gerhard's computers begin to malfunction, as if somebody was messing with the mainframe. Anders and Ross go down into the basement in search of Benson. Anders locates Benson and has a brief firefight, injuring and disarming Benson before becoming lost in the maze of corridors. Benson goes back to the computer room to finish shutting down the computer mainframe and finds Ross. Ross picks up Benson's gun, Benson returns to the computer and goes to steal the gun from Ross. After an intense (and tearful) internal struggle finally shoots and kills Benson unintentionally.

Laura Grable says

I cannot fault a book for when it was written, but it is a huge understatement to say that this book has not stood the test of time. It is a book about implanting a computer into someone's brain in order to treat a violent form of epilepsy. Computers were brand new technology in 1971 and Crichton's book focuses on the fears that people had about computers getting too powerful. Usually Crichton's books are chilling in their accounts of science going awry but, unfortunately in this case, his imagined fears are not so scary or believable in 2010.

The technology is not the only thing out dated about this book. This book depicts people smoking like chimneys in hospitals, the female doctor in the book is presumed to be a nurse or a pediatrician (not a real doctor), her psychiatrist tells her it is masculine for a woman to take a shower instead of a bath, the characters assume that in order to build a smarter computer it must have to be the size of a skyscraper, etc. The only thing he correctly predicts is the depersonalization of the US, except he contributes that to the introduction of highways and not to computers.

Overall, forgiving the fact that this book is from a different time, the plot is still predictable and the characters are not that interesting. I'm a big fan of Crichton and, unfortunately, this is not one of my favorites.

Paulina Sanchez says

Quite an excellent story, Crichton, once again, kept me on the edge of my seat throughout the whole book. The only reason why I don't give this book the 5 stars is because the ending leaves you on the edge, there are some unanswered questions that I am still curious about. I am hoping that the film has an ending that will help me out with some closure.

That being said, The Terminal Man is an excellent story, ahead of its time and very relevant right now.

I recommend it to anyone who likes speculative fiction, tales of human and/vs machine, stories that will

make you look at all the machines/technology around you and make you want to go live in the forest for a while...

Manoj Payani says

Michael Crichton has always written books much ahead of his time, yet it is difficult to believe that this book was first published in 1972. The story revolves around the complications created when machines take control of humans (a precursor of Artificial Intelligence in recent times). Some chapters are spine-chilling especially the conversation between Benson and Dr. Ross at the latter's house, reminds of the conversation in *Silence of the Lambs* between Judie Foster and Anthony Hopkins. The best part of the book is that it can be finished in 2 - 3 sittings for an average reader, thus proving that thrillers need not really be lengthy and tortuous.

Barbara ★ says

Harry Benson is a computer analyst who works for the DOD and thinks machines are taking over the world. On top of his delusions, Harry was in a car accident which resulted in brain damage. Harry suffers from seizures which make him violent and he is wanted by the police. Most of the medical staff at University Hospital think he's a perfect candidate for surgery - implantation of a computer in his brain to stop the impulses triggering these seizures. All except his psychiatrist, Janet Ross, who realizes that Harry is psychotic and will feel that machines really are taking over at least taking over him. It all spirals out of control when after the operation, the nurses neglect to give him his medication. Then the race is on.

With a premise like that, this should have been an excellent book. However, it really fell flat. There was too much medical and computer speak, as well as too much interaction with the hospital staff and their hopes and dreams for fame and fortune. Granted some of this is necessary but 2/3 of the book? The ending was intense (and upped my rating to 3 stars) but the book itself merely rated 2 stars. A real disappointment from Crichton. I listened to this on audiotope otherwise I never would have finished it.

Benjamin Stahl says

Since I lost my mind I have formed what is fair to call a morbid fascination in the human brain. I am equally intrigued as I am disgusted by it. So I was pleasantly surprised when I discovered the premise for *The Terminal Man*. Basically a man who suffers "psychomotor epilepsy" is the subject for a new and controversial experiment where computer chips are placed inside his brain. A control receptor thingy - (I'm not good with science; spare me the jargon) - is placed in his shoulder. The idea is that whenever he shows signs of lapsing into an epileptic seizure - (which in this case will not just have him convulsing on the floor, but beating people indiscriminately) - a pleasure signal is stimulated inside his brain, cancelling out the attack. Since this is a Crichton book, however, it does not take long before shit hits the fan. Seems to be a bad combination when you mix artificial intelligence with a fucking nutcase. What a surprise, huh Michael? Guess these bozos will never learn.

Published in 1971, this is Crichton's second official novel - (that is, one not published pseudonymously). It is also maybe the best Crichton book I have read so far. Oh *man*, it feels good to say that. You see, I've always loved Crichton since my wide child eyes scoured *Jurassic Park* in two days during high school.

Unfortunately I found most of his stuff since then to be average at best. Being fair, I actually loved *The Lost World* when I gave it a second chance. And while *Prey* and *Micro* have their moments, they certainly weren't amazing. *Congo*, on the other hand, was so fucking boring I went off reading him for over two years. On deciding several weeks ago I ought to try another one, this is what I went with. And yeah, I'm happy to say that as soon as things kick off, this book is one hell of a fun read. Clocking in at just over 200 pages, it's shorter than my orgasms. You begin thinking maybe it's gonna be boring and overly scientific, but actually it gets interesting straight away. Like any good book by this man, it's not just the mesmerising combo between high concept science and page-turning thrills, but the exploration of whatever idea was currently giving him nightmares. This time around it isn't dinosaurs, giant insects, microchips or gorillas. It's simply the idea that man will one day lose his individual self, replacing his brain - (his very soul) - with computer technology. Nearly fifty years later, with speculative talk of one day being able to access Google from our heads, I really think this idea is scarier - (and more relevant) - than any others he has had.

Also, while good Crichton is always fun, even his best books suffer from flat, unlikable characters. And while I'm sure that some would say the same for *Terminal Man*, I actually liked everyone in this book. Even the villain was essentially sympathetic. They felt more like real humans in this early book before he became established and was obviously still trying to prove himself. It's a shame that later work does not reflect the same level of effort in fleshing out his characters. This book just felt different to the Crichton I was used to. There were so many minor features I really enjoyed. One of many was the abrupt ending which leaves you thinking, *Shit, that's it?*

I actually wished this book was *longer*, which for the most part is a compliment, not a complaint. It did exactly what it should have done, and I am grateful for this book because now I feel much more inclined to read more of Crichton's work.

Anne says

The Terminal Man is so far my least favorite of all Michael Crichton's novels. (I'm almost finished reading all of his fiction books.) But I couldn't rate it lower than three-stars, because this is *Crichton*, for pity's sake. He's one of my favorite authors. And I suppose the tremendous research and effort dedicated in this book is worth an additional star.

Okay, so this is about a man named Benson who frequently had violent seizures. People from the Neuropsychiatric Research Unit decided to apply some experimental methods to him that were never used in humans before, in an attempt to "cure" him. Whenever Benson would have a seizure, the electrodes placed in his brain would at once pulse some sort of pleasurable sensation. Apparently Benson liked this feeling very much that he managed to increase the stimulation (which would lead normally lead to seizures) in order to feel that pleasurable response. But it became too much for his brain to handle, and soon enough he was on the loose with a deadly intent on his mind.

I'm glad my General Biology class came in pretty handy, so I wasn't lost in all those scientific terminologies regarding the nervous system. One of the things I noticed here is that **there isn't too much piling of information**. I think that's a good thing, especially if you're the type of reader who'd get tired of the unceasing lectures and technical discussions. Nevertheless, I felt really educated after reading this because Crichton still inserted several tidbits every now and then, especially during dialogues (the briefing/ interview part of Benson was cleverly used).

The pace is very quick. Even the novel is quite short, and I finished it in about three hours or less. Unlike

his other novels, there wasn't much history or background on the characters. And the point-of-view primarily centered on Dr. Ross. It's rather rare for him to use a woman as the main character. Though to be honest, one couldn't really pinpoint a single person who could effectively be considered as the protagonist. Furthermore, **it was very straightforward**. I like that simplicity and economy of words and pages.

However, because of that, **the characters didn't develop very much**. There was hardly any time for characterization. And I felt like I wasn't able to get to know the characters better.

The writing could be better. But I understand that this was written much earlier. And having read Crichton's latter works, I can say that his writing style improved immensely. Sadly, in this book, **the descriptions were a bit bland**. (I'll cite an example when I get a hold of my copy.)

The suspense wasn't as intense as I expected. I'm not complaining; I think it was still satisfying. But the thrill only arrived towards the end of the book, which was unlike Crichton's other novels (as there was usually a continuous dose of thrill available all throughout). (view spoiler)

The ending took me by surprise. *Wow*, that was the first time I've ever come across his books wherein the ending was so *abrupt* and unexplained. I flipped to the next page and was flabbergasted to find it empty. It gave me goosebumps, really.

As usual, **the painstaking research done is commendable**. One look at the bibliography and you could already say that **The Terminal Man** was a very intelligently-crafted work. I felt so smart after reading it, as if a considerable amount of knowledge was entered into my brain. (Heh, mind control, indeed.)

Although this isn't really my favorite, I'd still recommend this. The main reason would probably be because **the subject matter is controversial and leaned more on psychology and ethics than medical science**. The implications of this research were massive, indeed.

Jim says

Years ago, I saw "The Andromeda Strain" & then saw this book, so I picked it up. It was pretty good & was an early explorer of man-computer interfacing. It also shows the fallacy of positive feedback as a form of control. There's a fair amount of gore & the hospital descriptions really impressed me. It might be a bit dated now, though.

If you have to hunt up a volume, try to find the first hardback. It had some good, if a bit gruesome, illustrations in it, as I recall.

Sam Ang says

The full review is available at the following link:
<http://bookunderthesun.blogspot.com/2...>

Although he is not the protagonist of the story, the whole event revolved around Harry Benson, a patient suffering from a violent seizure known as Acute Disinhibitory Lesions, or ADL (not sure if it is a real

syndrome). Harry's seizure came and go, and was so violent that a police guard was required to escort him into the hospital in case his epilepsy occurred. During the course of the seizure, Harry would have no control over his actions nor his behavior, and would act violently towards anyone in his immediate surrounding.

The core of *The Terminal Man* portrayed the relationship between man and machine. Computers are created to aid human in the development of technology and as computing power gets stronger by the decade, the question arising in everyone's mind is whether computers will take over human as the intelligence of our civilization. The story explores the psychotic fear of Harry against machines as he viewed machines as an intelligence that will ultimately take over human, and the implantation of a computer chip to help control his seizures is only adding to his fear.

Paul says

'The Terminal Man' by Michael Crichton

The Plot:

Harry Benson is a man who suffers from seizures, caused by brain damage incurred as a result of a car accident. These seizures are unpredictable & distressing for Benson who has blackouts, can't remember where he has been or his actions whilst 'unconscious'. What happens, invariably, during these blackouts, is that Benson becomes involved in fights. He attacks his victims with a ferocity that belies his diminutive stature.

Benson comes to the attention of a group of surgeons, doctors & a psychiatrist collectively called the Neuro-Psychiatric Service, at the University Hospital, who have been experimenting with 'interfacing' a computer with the human brain to control aberrant behavior, by the use of electrodes implanted in the brain. Benson appears to be a perfect subject for this procedure, to everyone but the psychiatrist in the group, Janet Ross. Ross is concerned about Benson's apparent schizophrenia, as Benson has a phobia about machines taking over the world from humans & becoming a machine himself, as a result of the operation. While the doctors & surgeons in the group concede that the operation won't 'fix' Benson's delusions, they decide to proceed with the procedure.

What follows Benson's operation is a predictable realization of Benson's worst fears & confirmation of Ross' misgivings, culminating in the murder of a companion of Benson's & Benson's demise at the hands of Ross, when Benson attacks her.

I recall reading 'The Andromeda Strain' as a teenager & enjoying it tremendously. I didn't read 'Jurassic Park', but like many others, i watched the movie made from the book. Who doesn't enjoy the spectacle of dinosaurs chomping on humans?

It's been 40+ years since Crichton published this novel & if it were good it would be considered a classic, instead of merely dated. Crichton has never been known for his ability at building believable or sympathetic characters, but in 'The Terminal Man' he takes this to new heights (or depths, depending how you look at it). His characters are more wooden & less believable than either his earlier or later efforts, in my opinion. At one point the psychiatrist, Ross, is asked by the Detective leading the inquiry into the death of Benson's companion, to meet him at the scene of the crime to discuss Benson's state of mind. How likely is this? Not very, i believe. At this meeting, there is a brief conference between the Detective, Ross & the attending Coroner. The coroner tells the other two he has confirmed the murderer was Benson. How does he do this? Well, in the hour since the murder occurred he has tested the blood & other bodily fluids & has ascertained

they are indeed Benson's. Really? I didn't know that such forensic tests could be carried out so swiftly 40 years ago. I'm fairly sure the same tests would take much longer even today. This was only one of the glaring examples of illogic in this novel. It's as if Crichton came up with a good idea for a plot, then sleepwalked through the writing of it.

At the back of the paperback edition i own, there is an exhaustive list of various references supposedly consulted by Crichton, relating to brain research blah, blah, blah. I don't buy it. To have consulted so many references & served up such a pallid & wafer thin novel beggars belief. I believe his list of references are no more than 'smoke & mirrors'.

By all means read 'The Terminal Man' if you are credulous & able to suspend all commonsense. I give this 2 out of 5 stars, although i was tempted to give it one.

Good reading!

James says

Listened to on CD. One of Crichton's earliest works. It is dated for the 21st century, but his style and formula is fairly clear as far back as the early 1970's. The only difference is that there is a little more character development than in his later novels. BUT ONLY a LITTLE! The possible relationship with the detective and female doctor wants to go somewhere but doesn't quite catch. The book ends very abruptly. I think Crichton finished it like that in order to generate talk and discussion about the subject at hand.

I would have loved to have heard an interview with Crichton in the 21st century regarding the subject matter. I have a brother with epilepsy and he has a Va-gal nerve stimulator that does what Harry Benson's electrodes did. The only difference is that it actually helps my brother to arrest seizure activity and he is hardly more machine for it.

REgardless, it is a fairly good book and worth checking out if you are a fan. I started the movie, but haven't finished it yet. It seems to follow the book quite well so far.

Joe says

Brief synopsis; neurologists implant a patient's brain with electrodes in an attempt to calm his violence-inducing seizures. As 'playing God' goes, the doctors involved fall a few steps short of Frankenstein or Jekyll, but they engage in quite a lot of back-slapping, words-of-caution-ignoring and unhatched-chicken-counting. Needless to say a garden-variety thriller breaks out.

What sets The Terminal Man apart is how thoroughly researched it is; we're talking 5 pages of bibliography and technical references for a short novel. Perhaps Crichton just binged on Neurology articles because he was interested in the subject and figured he might as well write a novel about it.

The bulk of the story comes pre-op; detailing the science and personalities in play while the inevitable rampage ends up feeling rushed and perfunctory. It makes me wonder whether he could've cut the thriller elements entirely and just given us a story of complex people and their complex experiments. Medical dramas only work on TV I guess.

Jennifer says

The Terminal Man was interesting, in its way. It's an older Michael Crichton book and isn't as polished or as intense as his later works. It's another of his books that I would recommend only to hardcore Crichton fans. I had some difficulty understanding Harry's actions, even though they were fully explained in the book. I'm not sure if this was more about me not comprehending the psychological/medical/technological aspects of the book or if the book wasn't basic enough for a lay-person.

Ashish says

A typical Crichton thriller; It's a casual airport novel which is fast-paced, has a lot of action, chases, coffee drinking, cigarette smoking and some violence. It seems a bit dated with its talk of the growing omnipresence of computers in our day to day life and an eye on the potential growth in the future along with the drastic growth in their power and functions. As a parallel, it talks of the power of the brain in the scale of a computer and how the two can potentially interact and be made to work together - the brain controls the computer in that the human brain has invented it and operates it, what if the brain were to be controlled by a computer which runs it? That seems to be the crux of the morality of the book. What appealed to me more than this dilemma was the talk of brain functioning and the research behind traumatic brain damage and violent tendencies. It is a topic of major research, especially in sports research as the study of repeated blows to the head and repeated concussions termed Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) in boxing, American football and professional wrestling and its effect on the long-term mental health of the sportsmen.

The narrative is pretty fast, doesn't leave much scope for major character development except the main lead and the book suffers from making some obvious revelations in the earlier part of the book which makes a few later actions of the characters quite obvious. Crichton does have a keen eye for writing about medical procedures and terminology (as seen in his hit tv show ER) which he does really well here

Naveen says

At first, I thought that this book was going to be purely medical fiction, and did not expect to understand much or enjoy it. It is not. This is about how a human brain can control a computer, and vice versa. A man with ADL (Acute Disinhibitory Lesion) is operated upon to "cure" his disorder, by implanting electrodes into his brain that would prevent seizures by sending signals to the brain. This would be controlled by a miniature computer (second "brain"), which is also implanted in his body. The story is mostly about the aftermath of this operation.

Written way back in 1971, the author very nicely explains how the computer is similar to a human brain. Also, he also gives a very basic idea of the concept of artificial intelligence. This book screams "Machines are going to take over the world" all the way. The author wanted this point to be driven home.

I enjoyed reading this book as it is fast paced, and quite thrilling. Crichton has done a lot of research in writing this book, the details of which I thoroughly liked. I also enjoyed his descriptions of how the computers used to be then - huge, bulky, programs to be punched in, and amazed at how easy it is right now.

I found the procedures that happen in the operation theater, and the operation in itself a bit boring though.

This is a good read even if you are not familiar with neuroscience or computer science.

Jean-Paul says

The Terminal Man by Michael Crichton.

One of Crichton's earlier works The Terminal Man is not as polished or as engaging as his later Science Fiction or Medical Fiction, but the hint of greatness is definitely evident and despite the fact that the book is 41 years old this year the story is still a compelling read with a few unexpected twists and turns. The Terminal Man is the story of, Harry Benson, a normal man who following a car accident develops a violent side which is triggered by a seizure and a black out. The technical medical term (I looked it up) is "psychomotor epilepsy." Medical science steps in to try to do an experiment in mind control, embedding a series of wires in the man's brain with a computer control to spark the right synapses when it detects that a seizure is about to happen. If you're a student of medical history you'll be familiar with the story of Phineas Gage and you'll note some similarities here. For everyone else this is a Jekyll and Hyde story without the magic potion.

Without giving too much away the action of the story really gets going when you find out that due to a miscalculation and a psychological misreading of the patient the effect of the surgery is only delaying the eventual release of Benson's dark violent side. He's a man with a ticking time bomb inside his head and anyone in his way when it goes off is in for a world of hurt.

They made a movie version of this book in 74, but I haven't seen it. However I did see a very good Christopher Walken film called "The Happiness Cage" or "The Mind Snatchers" depending on which release you see that covers some of the same ground. That movie came out in 1972 as well, so I wonder if the book influenced the movie or vice versa, or it's just another of those cases where an idea's time had come and several people ran with it. Probably the later.

In any case, if you like Crichton this is a fast read and holds up well. It's not his best, but it won't put you to sleep and the science it describes is still relevant today as we're not really all that more informed about what all the different parts of the brain actually do. It's still a brave frontier and there's a lot of room for research and growth.

Jessica says

So. Much. Coffee.

Arun Divakar says

It was rather ironic to jump from Henry Marsh's account to Michael Crichton and both these books are based on neurosurgery. The important point to note was that these two books are as different as chalk and cheese. Having read through almost all of Crichton's oeuvre, I think this is one of his weakest books.

The premise is standard Crichton fare of science running amok and how we finally fix it. It goes like :

Scientists goof up.
Trouble begins and goes unnoticed.
Trouble escalates.
People die.
Heroes step in.
Wham, bam, thank you ma'am and sirs !
The end.

There you have it ! Science, you are too naughty !

Jason says

Through the use of tools mankind has made unimaginable advances, and with the ever increasing advances in tools progress has come at increasing speed and complexity, but at what point are the advances untenable? At what point does the dependency on the tools become a weakness? At what point do we design our own destruction?

This is a classic 'man orchestrates his own downfall' or 'man created monster' warning tale, but at the same time it is a quick paced thriller. This might be my favorite Crichton so far - not that he is one of my favorite authors - but this book is short and while you can see that he has done his customary research, this book keeps the focus on a concise plot better than some others I have read by him (I'm looking at you Next). The reader can get a sense of the complicated nature of neuropsychiatry, and how little we understand the human brain (or at least how little we understood it in 1972) while not feeling like they are reading a fear-monger's treatise on the subject. We get the background, but only enough so that we can see the implications on the specific story. It is a story that will make you think, but also entertains.

This story specifically centers around a man named Henry Benson whom has brain damage, and partially due to this damage he has episodes of uncontrollable rage and psychosis, this man is also brilliant in his own right. At a research facility we have doctors and biotechnology experts that are on the cutting edge of neuropsychiatry and they believe that they can implant a computer that will correct some of Benson's damage, and hopefully alleviate the violent attacks. Predictably, the excrement hits the air conditioning (to borrow a quote from Kurt Vonnegut) after the procedure has been completed. Overly eager and arrogant men can not control the impacts of their actions, nor the reactions of their test-subject. A chaotic and dangerous man is on the loose in L.A. and the only hope lies in the surgical hands of the very same people that implanted him to begin with, but his very psychosis that has been exacerbated by the implantation assures that he will not be seeking their help.

The characters are not the most well rounded and developed, but neither are they completely two-dimensional. For a quick and interesting thriller the level of characterization works well enough. For me this leans to the high-end of a three-star rating, it accomplishes what it sets out to do and is a fun, if somewhat dark, ride along the way.
