A fantastical view of warfare in the 20C from the French illustrator Robida involving aircraft, tanks, chemical and biological weapons.

Robida is said to have shown a penchant for satire even in his youth; by 1873, he had founded his own satirical journal, La Caricature. A decade later, he published the first of a trilogy of satirical, futuristic novels, The Twentieth Century (Le Vingtième siècle), which portrayed everyday life in 1950s France. That book would be followed in 1887 by War in the Twentieth Century (La Guerre au Vingtième siècle), and in 1891 by The Electric Life (La vie électrique), which was a sequel of sorts to The Twentieth Century, though it featured different characters. [Antulio J. Echevarria (2007) Imagining Future War: The West’s Technological Revolution and Visions of Wars to Come, 1880-1914 ]

Extract:
The first half of the year 1945 had been particularly peaceful. Apart from the usual goings-on — that is, apart from a small three-month civil war in the Danubian Empire, apart from an American offensive against our coast which was repulsed by our submarine fleet, and apart from a Chinese expedition which was smashed to pieces on the rocks of Corsica — life in Europe continued in total calm......... So, on June 25 he [Molinas] was surprised to learn from the Midday Bulletin that a threat of war had been growing over the last two days, and that the fairly rosy political outlook had suddenly become very black indeed. What seemed serious was the purely financial nature of the clash. It was a matter of tariffs that went to the heart of national interests. Business is business! Nowadays, in civilized countries, commercial treaties are imposed by gunfire. ‘Well, well!’ Molinas thought, ‘I only hope that it will not ruin my bathing holiday.’ As he was finishing his cigarette, an announcement came through on the telephonograph.

A number of papers discuss Robida’s work:

Now all but forgotten, the nineteenth century journalistic illustrator Albert Robida was one of the earliest artists capable of developing tales of vivid futures through his expert drawings. A contemporary of future-seekers in prose such as Jules Verne, Edward Bellamy and H.G. Wells, the French artist also had the unusual gift of foreseeing not only what was possible, but also what could actually come true.


I would contend, however, that Robida’s fictional speculations are among the best of this period. They have more “substance” — i.e., they contain more contextual elements giving dimension to and fleshing out his portrayals of the future—than any other sf [science fiction] of his era. Very popular in France during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Robida was acutely aware of the intricacies of conjecture as he extrapolated potential futures from the social trends of his time.


Who before the First World War, most accurately predicted to the public the shape of the world that we now live in? Who best foresaw the scientific and technological miracles
that we take for granted? At the same time, who most clearly perceived and warned of the environmental and ecological dangers that would accompany these advances? And finally, who predicted the close co-operation between science and the military that would result in biological, chemical, and other doomsday weapons? The answer to all four questions is the same person........

The man who most clearly and accurately predicted the shape of the technological revolution that has marked the twentieth century was not Verne (nor H.G. Wells), but rather a now-forgotten French writer and illustrator named Albert Robida (1848-1926).

Flaubert Melina reçut l’ordre de rejoindre la flotte française; en raison de ses braves services, il fut détaché à la mer avec une qualité d’ingénieur-torpilleur; et fortement recommandé à l’amiral, qui lui confia le commandement du Cymare de Polastrum, torpilleur sous-marins de construction toute nouvelle.

Flaubert gagna rapidement son port d’embarquement et prit son commandement. Le Cymare de Polastrum, de dimensions très restreintes, portant seulement cinq hommes, était un de ces petits torpilliers qui formaient une et divers, destinés aux plus coups de main en même temps que leurs expériences faciles, un de ces torpilliers nommés la rase qui se glissent entre deux maîtresses et viennent par en demeurant leurs torpilles dans la coque des gros navires.
Le commandant de l’Épervier réunit ses hommes et leur assena en quelques mots vibrants de patriotisme que la guerre devait être déclarée à minuit juste. L’équipage s’installa hâtivement. De temps en temps le commandant treuilla sa montre. Soudain un signal d’en haut, le lieutenant toucha un bouton, le propulseur électrique entra en action et l’Épervier s’élança en avant emportant mon ami Molina vers la plage. Au jour levant, une odeur nauséabonde réveilla Molina dans son hamac, il monta sur le pont de l’Épervier qui flottait à travers un brouillard épais.

L’escadre croisait une division de brouillards volants en train de couvrir la frontière d’un brouillard opaque destiné à dissimuler les opérations.
Robida, A. (1883) La Guerre au Vingtième Siècle