

Profile

Marc André Meyers, Ph.D.

Local science professor tackles the ‘unfinished business’ of writing thriller and science fiction novels

Author to discuss novel at Mysterious Galaxy bookstore

BY ARTHUR LIGHTBOURN
Contributor

For Marc André Meyers, whose continuing career as a researcher spanning more than 40 years has gained him a worldwide scientific reputation, writing novels is simply taking care of “unfinished business,” something he always wanted to do and is now doing.

Meyers is a Distinguished Professor of Materials Science at the University of California San Diego.

He heads a materials science group at UCSD: he is an expert in explosives, but for the past 10 years has concentrated on applying his research to biological materials; he is the author of three science and engineering books, including the classic textbook, “Dynamic Behavior of Materials” (J. Wiley, 1994); and, most recently, he authored

two novels, the December-released thriller “Chechnya Jihad” and the 2006 science fiction novel “Mayan Mars.”

A book-signing and discussion with Meyers is scheduled for Saturday, May 28, at 2 p.m. in the Mysterious Galaxy bookstore, 7051 Clairemont Mesa Blvd., Suite #302, San Diego; and at the UCSD Bookstore, Tuesday, May 31, at noon.

At 64, Meyers is gray-haired, tall, lean, sophisticated, well-travelled, fluent in five languages, a divorced father of two grown children and grandfather of two, who keeps in shape surfing, jogging and kayaking.

He was born in João Montevade, Brazil, “a deep valley, surrounded by woods and the pungent smell of a steel plant that spewed fire and dust over the region.”

Meyers showed an early talent and enthusiasm for writing that was encouraged in school by Dutch nuns and a priest, Padre

Henriques, who formed a literary association.

The boy dreamt of one day becoming a writer.

“But my father was an engineer and he said: ‘Marc, study engineering and you’ll always have a good job.’”

Meyers’ father was a metallurgical engineer who, with a group of other engineers, had emigrated from Luxembourg to build the town’s steel plant. Meyers was one of four brothers in his family. Before beginning his engineering studies at Brazil’s Federal University of Minas Gerais, he studied in Belgium, interned as a newspaper reporter in Brazil and served in the Brazilian Army.

In his senior year of engineering, (“I don’t recall which dictator ruled Brazil at the time”) he completed a book of poetry, with the provocative title *IMPLOSAO* (Implosion), and had 60 moonlight copies printed at the university print shop.

He wanted to become a published poet before going to graduate school.

“At the time, and unknowingly to us, military censors would routinely check every printed word in university print shops,” Meyers said.

Shortly afterwards, the director of the school called Meyers in and told him that the feared SNI (National Information Service) had paid a visit and were demanding an explanation for the publication of Meyer’s poems which they considered as “inflammatory and subversive material.”

If they opened an investigation, Meyers would have had to remain in Brazil for three years and delay going to graduate school in the U.S.

Meyers chose to leave Brazil in a hurry, forfeiting a Fulbright fellowship for which he had been a finalist.

Thirty years later, he would republish his original poems, translated into English, and with additional poems, titled *Abcission/Implosion* (Writers Club Press, 2001).

After leaving Brazil,



Marc André Meyers, Ph.D.

(PHOTO: JON CLARK)

Meyers joined his brother in Denver, where he obtained an assistantship at the University of Denver, and later earned a master’s degree and doctorate in materials science and engineering.

“That’s where I learned about explosives. They had an explosives center there,” he said.

After four years in Denver, he returned to Brazil and, for the military, in Rio de Janeiro, set up the country’s first explosives lab.

He subsequently, on invitation, returned to the U.S. as a visiting professor at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology; then to New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, which has the most extensive university explosives lab in the world and where he remained for 10 years. In 1989, he joined UCSD.

His novel “Chechnya Jihad” revolves around the accidental discovery by university research professor Jean-Claude Delvaux in New Mexico of a biology-enhanced super explosive dubbed C4 that is 10 times more powerful than conventional explosives. When the explosive is stolen, Delvaux volunteers for a NSA/CIA-led commando raid launched from Chechnya and aided by Chechen Muslim mercenaries to retrieve

the explosive from a Russian biological/chemical warfare lab in Siberia where it was to be analyzed.

Moved by the Chechens’ struggle for independence from Russia, Delvaux serves as a guerilla sniper, using 7.62 mm cartridges hand-loaded with small amounts of his C4 explosive to destroy scores of the Russian reactive armor T72 tanks, in the First Chechen War in 1994. He also becomes disillusioned with the

cruelty of war. He returns to the States and to a professorship at Harvard, a new marriage and the birth of a son, only to be lured back to Chechnya in 2006 and into the continuing struggle that has become part of al-Qaeda’s global jihad or “holy war.”

What prompted Meyers to write about Chechnya and jihad?

From 1994 to 1996, Meyers traveled to the Soviet Union four times as one of the key liaison scientists in a technological exchange program on the effects of explosives in metals with Russian scientists. One of the conferences was held at the foot of Mount Elbrus in the Caucasus close to Chechnya.

“I could feel the tension between the local Muslim population and the Russians,” Meyers said. “They felt the Russians were invaders. They stopped a funicular and let the Russians hang there for an hour or so. The driver almost capsize our bus. These were not accidental events.

“At the same time the Chechen movement started up for independence and I became interested and started reading up on it.”

Despite overwhelming manpower, weaponry and air support, Russian forces have been unable to establish permanent control over

the mountainous Northern Caucasus region.

“The cruelty of this war haunted me for a long time,” Meyers said. “They are still fighting, and I think, at the end of the day, they will be free and the Caucasus will not be part of Russia.”

With limited time because of his academic and research responsibilities at UCSD, when he’s in the writing mode, Meyers writes every morning for an hour and 15 minutes and when traveling on planes he puts in six to eight hours.

His earlier novel, “Mayan Mars,” was a science fiction work in which widowed professor Gustavo Chen is invited to take part in a mysterious space research project in which he must confront and attempt to defeat a mutated virus that threatens humanity.

“Mayan Mars” is available on Kindle and “Chechnya Jihad” will soon also be available on Kindle.

He is currently working on a third novel, “Squid,” “a Baja/narco/fantasy.” And he is looking for a literary agent to represent him.

He describes his reading habits, even to this day, as “omnivorous.” “I started in childhood with Edgar Rice Burroughs (Tarzan books) and all of Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes) and went on to Hemingway, Hesse, Dostoyevsky, Camus, de Chardin, Dumas, Neruda, pulp and Latin American authors. Whatever I could get my hands on. The good, the bad and the ugly stuff.

“What I like about Hemingway is that he does not succumb to the intellectual temptation of writing about inner voyages devoid of action.

“He was an inspiration to me and I admire his strength and vigor, symbolic of this nation.

“Maybe I’m not a famous writer or a great writer,” he said, “but I write and I struggle and I improve. You learn writing by writing.”