



TMS Member Profiles

## Meet a Member: Marc Meyers Explores Scientific Consequences through Fiction

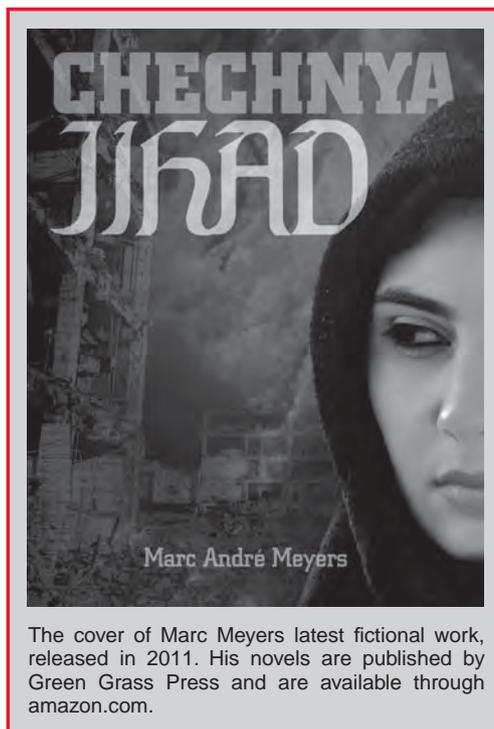
By Lynne Robinson

It was smoldering resentment witnessed at the foot of Mount Elbrus in the Caucasus region of Russia that planted the seeds for *Chechnya Jihad* in Marc Meyers' imagination. Currently professor of materials science at the University of California, San Diego, Meyers was attending a conference on explosive effects in materials and "could feel the tension between the local population and the Russians." The manifestation of this acrimony was generally passive-aggressive in nature. Meyers observed, for instance, that the local Caucasus operators of the funicular that crept up the side of the mountain willfully stranded a group of Russian tourists for an hour or so and that the bus drivers seemed to enjoy giving their passengers a particularly perilous ride. It was after digging a little deeper into the history of the region that Meyers realized how deep the wounds of war ran for the Chechen people and felt moved to shed light on a conflict that had barely grazed the consciousness of most of the world.

Meyers is no stranger to expressing his opinions through works of literature. While an engineering school senior in Brazil, when the country was under military control, he was almost arrested by the Department of Social Vigilance for publishing a poem that ridiculed the military hierarchy and was compelled to leave the country just before graduation. After successfully republishing his poems in English many years later, Meyers was inspired to continue exploring the creative forces of his youth and eventually produced his first published novel, *Mayan Mars*, in 2006.

*Mayan Mars* chronicles the adventures of a scientist trying to save the world from a mutant extraterrestrial virus. *Chechnya Jihad*, Meyers' second novel, published in 2011, likewise has a

scientific experiment gone wrong propelling its action. This time, the technology in question is a super explosive concocted by accident in a New Mexico laboratory by a young materials scientist named Jean-Claude Delvaux, with



The cover of Marc Meyers latest fictional work, released in 2011. His novels are published by Green Grass Press and are available through [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

much of the subsequent action focused on his attempts to deal with the unintended consequences of his discovery. In the process, he becomes embroiled in the struggles of the Chechen people to preserve their culture and homes.

There are echoes of Meyers' own experiences in the character of Jean-Claude—most notably his Luxembourg heritage and research on the explosive effects in materials, as well as a description of the purposefully stalled funicular that partially inspired the book. "There is no conscious attempt at using real persons as characters in the novel, although I believe that the protagonists in New Mexico are an amalgam of real people," he said. "I deconstruct persons and experiences and

then use these pieces to create different characters." Meyers did note that some of the characters set in Chechnya, Maskhadov, and Basayev, were based on "real fighters that succumbed in the conflict." His extensive research on the region and its people also show in the everyday details he presents on the Chechens and their faith. "One of my hopes is that the reader will develop an appreciation of true Islam, its positive values and strength. It is too often stereotyped in the media," he said.

Many of the characters in *Chechnya Jihad*, including Jean-Claude, are driven to extremes by desperate circumstances, with each act of violence or betrayal only serving to deepen, rather than resolve, the misery. While there are glimmers of hope, Meyers does not offer any pat happy endings to his story. "My intent was to show that violence only begets violence," he said.

Meyers currently has several more novels in various stages of completion and is driven to "keep improving, refining my style and ideas." He said, "I first plow through a book, creating a terrible draft. Then comes the boring part, to rewrite and rewrite. It is an inner struggle."

His reasons for balancing his devotion to the often painful and frequently thankless pursuit of fiction writing with his research and teaching is summarized in the biography that he prepared to support publication of *Chechnya Jihad*: "By writing I can penetrate into unknown worlds, redress wrongs, create beauty and justice, free of the impediments of action and the difficulties and strictures of science."

Each month, *JOM* profiles a TMS member and his or her activities both in and out of the realm of materials science and engineering. To suggest a candidate for this feature, contact Maureen Byko, *JOM* editor, at [mbyko@tms.org](mailto:mbyko@tms.org).