

The Carmel Valley Town Focus page appears Fridays. Send Datebook listings at least 14 days in advance to julie.pendray@uniontrib.com. For story suggestions, contact Julie Pendray four weeks in advance by e-mail or at (760) 737-7562.



Marc André Meyers, a professor at UCSD, sat with his dog, Moopi. Meyers is the author of "Mayan Mars." *David Brooks/Union-Tribune*

Book covers plague, Mayans and mysticism

By Sharon A. Heilbrunn
COMMUNITY NEWS WRITER

CARMEL VALLEY — Marc André Meyers spent nearly two years buried in pages of microscopic extra-terrestrial life and worldwide disasters.

He is the author of "Mayan Mars," a science fiction thriller about one man's attempt to stop mutated Martian viruses from coming to Earth in the form of a killer plague.

The professor of materials science at the University of California San Diego said that although the book is fiction, it's based on factual evidence and research.

The book centers on Gustavo Chen, a recently widowed professor who throws himself into teaching and research. He is invited to take part in a mysterious space research project, which leads him into a world of secrets, indigenous beliefs and extra-terrestrial life. After realizing that a

mutated virus has the potential to wipe out all of humanity, Chen must stop the disaster.

Mayan culture was the inspiration for the book, Meyers said. The story spans the centuries from A.D. 514 to the end of the Mayan calendar — 2012.

There is a Mayan prophecy that the year 2012 will bring "the end of man," Meyers said. "Mayan Mars" explores the prediction.

Meyers began toying with the idea of the book after spending two months in a remote area in the Amazon region, followed by a trip through Bolivia, Peru and Mexico.

There are two elements to the book, he said.

One is scientific and deals with academic intrigue and a cutthroat, competitive atmosphere.

The other is spiritual. "It deals more with mysticism," Meyers said. "It deals

with the danger of the pandemic and the fear of what it can do."

Two different worlds "crash" in the book, he said — the Mayan world, based on sacrifice and tradition, and the Western world, based on academics and rationalization.

"The two parallel stories converge at the end," he said.

Meyers, 59, was born in Brazil. He moved to the United States at 23 as a student.

Although his parents encouraged him to pursue an engineering career, he loved writing and published a poetry book in Brazil.

"I came to the United States and got a Ph.D., but the whole time I continued writing," he said.

He co-founded the Center for Explosives Technology Research in New Mexico and worked as a materials science adviser to the U.S. Army. He has been a researcher since 1972.

Meyers' fascination with plagues came after he was involved with a research project

The Mayan cultural element was inspired by his travels.

"I was amazed by their construction, architecture and knowledge of stars," he said.

Although there are similarities between the main character and himself — they are avid surfers, travelers and researchers — Meyers said the character wasn't based on him.

"It's based on 'fake reality,'" he said. "You break reality and take all the little pieces and then rebuild reality the way you see it."

This is Meyers' second novel and sixth book.

It took a lot of rewriting and research to get to the final version, he said.

"There's a point where you just pull out your hair and think it's never going to be any good, but you go back and keep working on it and make it right," he said. "I hope this book will shake readers up inside and, at the end, they will come up with a beautiful vision — that science and mysticism can be compatible and con-