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By Gary Robbins 2:53 P.M. JUNE 21, 2011 Updated 4:06 P.M.

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Meyers plans to continue roaming the world as a researcher and teacher. And, with some effort, become a better surfer. — UCSD

Poet. Explosives expert.

The titles don't seem to go together. But they both apply to Marc Andres Meyers, a materials scientist at the University of California San Diego. He's primarily an explosives expert, having found ways to improve armor, gauge the reliability of nuclear weapons, and figure out what lasers do to metals. Meyers also is an expert in the emerging field of biomimetics, where researchers design products that mimic designs found in nature.

But the 64-year-old Brazilian also is the author of poetry, science fiction, and suspense. In other words, his interests are broad. Still, it is hard to capture a sense of a man in a resume or the dust jacket of a book.



Meyers spent memorable days on the Purus River, which wiggles through the Amazon. — NASA says, "Smoke from fires in Georgia and Florida streamed eastward over the Atlantic Ocean on June 15, 2011. The Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectr



Boris Yeltsin stands on a tank during a failed coup attempt in 1991. Meyers visited the tense city two days before the show

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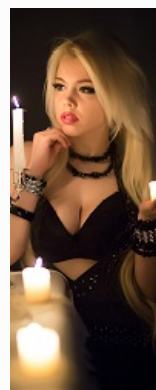
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I got the inspiration for my first book, "Mayan Mars," during a scientific meeting at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, where I was part of a team determining whether a spacecraft that was meant to return Martian soil to Earth should include an explosive charge.

I actually wanted to become a writer and worked part-time at a newspaper as a young man. My first job was inglorious. My boss would ask me to translate articles from French magazines into Portuguese. I would hand them to him and they would appear a few days later with him as the author. This was my first exposure to plagiarism.

I return to my hometown of Joao Monlevade, Brazil every year where my nanny, age 92, anxiously waits for me. Her unconditional love has spanned all these years.

I often think of the rouge on nanny's cheeks, and that she loves blue dresses, "the color of the sky."

I am building a sports center with my brother, Pedro, in a deprived neighborhood of that hometown. We'll have soccer, boxing, track and basketball. My dream is to prepare young athletes for the future (2016) Olympics in Brazil.

I met my wife, Linda Golnaz, at Mary, Star of the Sea Catholic Church, in La Jolla. I had just joined UC San Diego. She is from Iran and taught me to love the Middle East and its complexities.

The most significant accomplishment of my life are my two children, Marc and Maria Cristina.

I have been working with huge lasers for the past 12 years. It's thrilling. Some of my work involves the new Livermore laser facility, which is the largest in the world and cost as much as an aircraft carrier.

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As a young and obscure researcher, I met the editor of a prestigious Cambridge journal when I was in a sauna during a conference. I asked him why he had rejected one of my papers several times. He answered, behind the haze of the fog, "Keep sending them, young man. One day you'll get one of them accepted."

One of my travels to Russia, to the Caucasus to be precise, led to the seeds of my latest, novel, "Chechnya Jihad."

I plan to continue working in La Jolla, Cambridge, England, China, Germany, Brazil -- wherever they want me. And to learn to surf better.

20 Things archive

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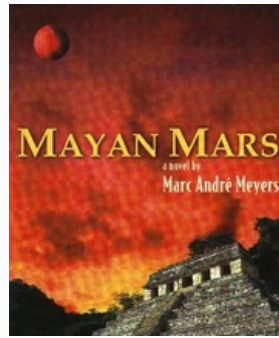
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So we asked Meyers to tell us 20 things he has done. — Wikipedia Commons

Here's what he told us:

I spent two months on the Purus River in the Amazon as an undergraduate student in Brazil and learned to respect the jungle after a scorpion dropped on my back, a snake almost bit me in the chest and I bumped into a dolphin as I jumped into a dark river.



I found a toucan skeleton, including the beak, when I visited the jungle as a teenager. The skeleton was both strong and light and would inspire a recent research study that gave me my five minutes of fame when it was featured on National Geographic and NOVA.

When I was an engineering student, I was chased out of Brazil, my home country, by the anti-leftist National Information Service. They didn't like it when I published a book of poetry.

I almost lost my eyes as a 12-year-old when I carelessly triggered explosives that I had taken from a construction site. I had aluminum fragments embedded all over my face.

I brought the famous soccer players Jorge Perez and David Jaramillo from Mexico to my club team at New Mexico Tech when I was a professor there.

I was 42 when I played my last soccer game at New Mexico Tech. We were trounced by the University of Texas-El Paso. It felt glorious to be in a big stadium, but I realized that my legs were gone forever.

I have run the La Jolla Half Marathon for close to 20 years and plotted my times, which have inexorably increased from 1 hour 40 minutes to 2 hours 10 minutes. I once passed a dead man on Torrey Pines Hill, which we now call Dead Man's Hill.

I started surfing at 55. I still feel giddy when I go out; there's no feeling like conquering a wave. But I am baaad!

At the end of the Cold War, I was one of the first Westerners to visit Krasnoyarsk and Chernogolovka, closed Soviet cities. I used to stay at the Akademick Hotel, which made the list of the 10 worst hotels in the world.

I was in Moscow two days before the attempted coup against Boris Yeltsin by the military. It felt like Brazil during the dictatorship. Military trucks and angry soldiers all over the place.

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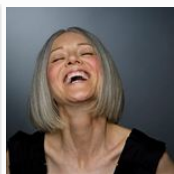
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