

Backstory For *Trident Code*

Thomas Waite

I could tell you that I came up with the idea for *Trident Code* while at a seminar on climate change held by the Union of Concerned Scientists. But I'd be lying.

The truth is I owe the genesis to the startling news last year that a large section of the mighty West Antarctica Ice Sheet was falling apart—and had passed the point of no return. I'd love to say I read about this in the science journal *Nature*, but that would also be a lie. The WAIS was such big news that I saw it on TV, replete with NASA animation as gripping as any twisted tale from the mind of Stephen King. Our world wouldn't be flooded overnight, but scientists were saying we'd basically screwed our offspring—or at least our offspring's offspring. Some were predicting that sea levels would rise 16 feet—in 200 years.

But what if you could make that happen sooner? Much sooner?

It struck me that no terrorist act, not even a nuclear bomb set off in New York City, could so unalterably change the Earth—if you could make this happen. From a plot standpoint, that “if” could be gold.

With the idea of rapid sea level rise, I started looking at what countries might fare relatively well if the oceans rose, say, three feet. Russia stood out. That seized my attention—along with an idea for a brazenly new Russian villain. I was bored with the old ones, even Putin, who was all over the news for invading and seizing Crimea, for meddling in the Ukraine, and for his macho, shirtless horseback riding. But Putin was so yesterday, so Cold War. I write cyberthrillers. I needed a *Code War* villain. That was how Oleg Dernov was born. But Oleg was a pushy guy and ended up assuming a far greater role than I'd originally envisioned. With his inimical voice, I had no choice but to agree to his demands.

I had two kinds of terrorism for this novel—cyber and environmental. But the trifecta is always the big winner. So what could trigger the rapid rise of the oceans? The answer was a nuclear submarine equipped with Trident II missiles. Do some hacking, hijack the sub, shave off part of the WAIS to raise sea levels to just the right level—and work them all into an evil plot by a devilishly fresh Russian rogue. I had my story.

I began by writing a detailed synopsis. Then I turned to primary and secondary research. While you can garner great information off the Internet and by reading select books and articles, nothing beats talking to experts. As my Acknowledgements attest, I consulted with CEOs of major cybersecurity firms; former and current senior government officials, such as the head of the FBI's Cyberterrorism Unit; and military experts, including a retired Admiral and former Vice President of the Chiefs of Staff. Their assistance was invaluable. As for the novel itself, writing it was pure pleasure.