

A Conversation with Thomas Waite

Author of *TRIDENT CODE*

Q: You have a background in technology. How much of what you write in your novels is fact?

A: Most of the technologies, cyber attack vulnerabilities, and cyber war scenarios in my novels are based on facts. There are well-documented examples of cyber attacks by China, Russia, North Korea, Israel, the U.S., and other countries. Power, water, fuel, communications, and transportation infrastructure are all vulnerable to disruption. I certainly want to entertain my readers, but I also view my novels as cautionary tales.

Q: How much and what kind of research went into your books?

A: I do a lot of primary and secondary research for my novels. Like other writers, the Internet offers a wealth of information that can be very valuable. I also read authoritative books and articles on various subjects. However, that only gets you so far. I consult with leading experts, such as CEOs of major cybersecurity firms and former and current senior government officials, including the head of the FBI's Cyberterrorism Unit. And I've benefitted enormously from my conversations with a retired Admiral and former Vice President of the Chiefs of Staff.

Q: Why compelled you to write a book that combines technological and ecological terrorism?

A: I was searching for a unique story with an unusual terrorist threat. I saw a startling news report that a large section of the mighty West Antarctica Ice sheet was falling apart—and had passed the point of no return. Scientists were predicting that sea levels would rise 16 feet in 200 years. It struck me that no terrorist act, not even a nuclear bomb in any of the world's largest cities, could so unalterably change the world if this could happen suddenly. Then I started looking at what countries might fare relatively well if the oceans rose about three feet. Russia stood out. With two kinds of terrorism for my novel—cyber and environmental—I wanted to go for the trifecta. Always the big winner, right? That was when a nuclear submarine equipped with Trident II missiles cruised into my story. A single Trident could shave off part of the WAIS to raise sea levels to just the right level. I had my story.

Q: Thrillers are largely a male-dominated genre, but your protagonist, Lana Elkins, is a woman. What made you decide on a heroine?

A: I'd grown up reading about the adventures of heroes like James Bond, Jason Bourne, Jack Ryan, and Jack Reacher. When I conceived of this series, I didn't think the world needed another stereotype macho male figure. So I created my heroine, Lana Elkins, a former NSA operative who now heads a cyber security firm. She's brave, smart, technologically a superstar, but still feminine, maternal, and human with flaws like anyone else.

Q: Oleg Dervov isn't the usual Russian villain. How did you come up with his character?

A: In many ways a thriller is only as good as its antagonist. The traditional Russian villain is something out of the Cold War. But I write cyberthrillers. I wanted to create a *Code War* villain, one who was creepy, despicable, and unforgettable. While writing my novel, he became funnier and larger than life, and assumed a far greater role than I'd originally envisioned. One reviewer describes him as a Russian mastermind that "you'll love to hate." That's what I was going for.

Q: Galina is naïve and impressionable at the beginning of *TRIDENT CODE*, and through the course of the book she becomes more savvy and cognizant of what Oleg has become. What particularly appeals to you about her?

A: Her strength and courage. She's a young, single mother with a deadbeat husband and a daughter with leukemia. She's also an incredibly technology-savvy woman who is duped by Oleg to believe their work is to improve the environment for the benefit of humankind. Once she realizes what he is really up to, she risks everything to save her daughter—and the world.

Q: *TRIDENT CODE* includes some scary technological warfare; what is your personal opinion about finding a balance between technological advancement and its inherent risk?

A: Advancements in technology have always carried risks and create unintended consequences. For example, the advent of the Internet has resulted in wonderful things, but because so much is now interconnected, it has also created serious vulnerabilities. There isn't a simple answer, but we certainly should do whatever we can to mitigate the chances of cyberwarfare. These steps might include conducting cyberwar limitation talks modeled after nuclear arms treaties; creating a global ban on the first use of cyberweapons against civilian infrastructure; putting in place accountability measures and severe consequences for assaults; investing in securing our networks and critical infrastructure; mandate rapid reporting of data breaches; and enacting long-overdue cybersecurity legislation. There will be many challenges, including prioritizing security over convenience and dealing with privacy concerns.

Q: What's next for Thomas Waite?

A: I'm currently at work on my next novel in this series, in which Lana for the first time confronts deadly threats to her and her family that originate from deep within the United States.

To request an interview with Thomas Waite, please contact Jeff Umbro, (212) 705-4226 or jumbro@goldbergmcduffie.com