

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRITZ STROBL

Q & A

Q. How did the Dr. Jack Stevens book series come about?

A. I love writing, but have never had time. Several years ago, I began thinking of story ideas and created a character, Dr. Jack Stevens, who inadvertently gets pulled into a political intrigue while caring for a new patient who's suffering with migraine headaches. Over time, I envisioned ways to develop this character's adventures into a series of books and that was a motivating factor in finally being able to make time to start writing.

Q. What has been going on in the worlds of medicine and technology that inspired the plots for each of your books?

A. Our brains produce electromagnetically much more information than what can be processed by an ordinary EEG, so I co-developed and patented a machine that examines the information more thoroughly via computerized analysis. We were even able to track some brain processing of images. Since engineering school, I thought that if we knew the *right* code (which, with computer analysis, we might), we could electronically *reverse* the process and *put thoughts into someone's brain*. This might be helpful in diseases like Alzheimer's. On the other hand, however, every good idea has an evil twin. Something like this could be done with a cell phone, magnetically, and no one would know. And since the ear is near the temporal lobe, which is important in memory function, it would be a great portal. This concept became the basis of my first book, *Presidential Migraines*.

For *Greek Flu*, my wife and I were on vacation cruise through the Cyclades. Some of these islands are remote and, since the Greeks do not always enforce borders, that area is an easy place to infiltrate--if someone was running a small biologic lab there it could be difficult to detect. The development of bioterrorism and designer viruses are not only very real, but also very scary. In causing a pandemic, delivering the biologic agent is the hard part; *Greek Flu* imagines one method of delivering.

My forthcoming novel, *Cyber Death*, explores the reality of how governments have access to everybody's personal data, including medical. If hacked, such information could be used to exploit or kill enemies, topple governments, or for blackmail. And, of course, make for a great next thriller!

Q. Like Dr. Jack Stevens, you're a neurologist at a large clinic in Minnesota? How much is Jack based on you and your experiences?

A. Writing experts and bestselling authors always say to “write what you know” and that’s definitely true. In creating Jack, I’ve drawn on my training and experience as a practicing physician at the Minneapolis Clinic of Neurology, as well as turns at the Mayo Clinic, Universities of London and Minnesota, and at Hennepin County Medical Center. My experiences as a doctor as well as an electrical engineer, are rich in information and detail—they make for great drama and intrigue. And, at times, a bit of humor.

Q. Who are your writing influences, particularly mystery/thriller authors?

A. I’m a fan of Tom Clancy, Vince Flynn, Nelson DeMille, Tess Gerritsen, and Michael Palmer.

Q. What do you enjoy most about writing? What is the greatest challenge?

A. Writing is a creative respite from the emotional toll of taking care of sick patients. It affords me the opportunity to let my imagination run wild. The biggest challenge is to keep the story well paced, keep the reader engaged, and leave clues that don’t make it too easy to figure out the ending.

Q. How long does it usually take you to complete a book from start to finish, while balancing a busy and successful medical practice?

A. Since I’m inspired by real events or concerns, certain story lines feel timely, so I tend to want to work on those first. Depending on the complexity of the story, it can take 12 to 18 months to complete a book. It’s my goal to write one book every year. Given the news and events occurring around the world daily, there’s certainly no shortage of interesting story ideas to keep me going.

For more information about Fritz Strobl and his books, visit www.fritzstrobl.net.

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