

## Coronado's George Galdorisi Co-Authors Tom Clancy Op-Center Series

*by David Axelson*

Authors George Galdorisi and Dick Couch may have just hit the mass market paperback mother lode. Fueled by their success of their 2012 novelization of the hit movie "Act of Valor" which sold 225,000 copies, the writing duo has taken over the Tom Clancy Op-Center series. Their newest book "Out of the Ashes" hit bookshelves May 20<sup>th</sup>.

It would be fair to point out at this time that I'm not exactly neutral on the subject of Clancy and his best-selling novels. Currently 11 of his hardbacks reside in my bookshelves and I consider "The Hunt for Red October" one of my all-time Top 10 favorite books. At his best, Clancy could spin a great yarn.

During a recent interview Galdorisi, a Coronado resident, discussed the renowned novelist and what led two U.S. Naval Academy graduates Couch (USNA '67) and Galdorisi (USNA '70) to revive the dormant series. "After his first few bestsellers, Clancy decided to expand the brand and started several series. Steve Pieczenik was associated with Tom Clancy (1947-2013) and created the concept of the Op-Center series with him. The first Op-Center book was written by Jeff Rovin in 1995 and the last one was published in 2005. Rovin started as a ghost writer and there were a total of 12 books in the original Op-Center series. For unknown reasons, the series stopped. Pieczenik and Clancy's first wife Wanda thought it was time to bring the series back. There is a dearth of military techno-thrillers out there now. If you look at the 'New York Times Bestseller List,' the market isn't saturated by any means. They thought the timing was right."

The creation of "Out of the Ashes" had a Hollywood feel to it, which Galdorisi described. "Pieczenik and Wanda Clancy, along with their agent Mel Berger at William Morris Enterprises, were looking for writers. Our agent John Silbersack auditioned Dick and me to reboot the series. After the success of "Act of Valor," they said, 'Sure we'll give these guys a try'."

Then there was the big concept conference call. "Pieczenik lives in Miami and he is a Harvard educated doctor and a PhD," Galdorisi explained. "In the creation of the book, we had a conference call with Pieczenik, Charlie Spicer who is our editor at St. Martin's Press, Silbersack, Dick and me. We brainstormed the high concept. One of the concerns Dick and I had was that we would be working in a very narrow swim lane and we would be asked to replicate the characters, organization and plot lines of the old Op-Center series. The last book was published in 2005 and is over a decade old. The world has changed so dramatically since then. Only three of the old Op-Center books were published after 9/11. We wanted to recreate Op-Center with new characters and have a substantially different operating concept. The high concept from the original series was Op-Center would go where no other instruments of national security could do the job, for whatever reason. It's probably analogous to (the television show) 24 that operates primarily internationally, with characters you like. That might capture the Op-Center series as we envision it going forward."

Couch and Galdorisi had other concerns about the revitalized series. "The other thing that was vitally important to us was that we were not trying to mimic Clancy's main line books. Clancy in all of his books was prescient. "Command Authority," which was published last year with his co-author, was written in 2011-12 and the high concept was planned in 2010. The setting in one of the early scenes is a battle being fought in the Ukraine among the U.S., the United

Nations and Russian armor. How prescient is that? Going forward with Op-Center, in addition to a strong plot and characters you root for, there are bad characters you can hate. We'll talk about the face of terrorism, how we respond and the tactics being used; where international relations and warfare are going in the future."

As authors, Galdorisi and Couch wanted to expand the potential readership of the series. "The challenge with this book was that the readers of the old series would embrace the new series. We want to appeal to a younger, more diverse, and technically savvy audience."

Having read and thoroughly enjoyed an advance copy of "Out of the Ashes," I can assure you that there is more than enough technology and plot pacing to hold the reader's attention. Couch and Galdorisi are uniquely qualified to create the new, improved Op-Center.

Couch, who resides in Ketchum, Idaho, graduated as the Honorman at the top of Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL Class No. 45 in 1969. He was an active duty SEAL during the Viet Nam War from 1968-72, serving as a platoon commander in SEAL Team One. After his active duty role in the SEALs, Couch served as maritime operations officer for the Central Intelligence Agency from 1973-77. He remained involved in the SEAL community, serving in the SEAL Reserves and attaining the rank of captain before he retired in 1997.

Galdorisi said of his co-author, "Dick knows more about Special Ops than any person on earth. He has written books about the SEALs, the Green Berets, the Rangers and now Marine Special Ops."

For his part, Galdorisi, a Brooklyn native, became a helicopter pilot and served in the Navy for 30 years before retiring, also as a captain. He now works for SPAWAR System Center Pacific in Point Loma, where he is director of the corporate strategy group. Between them they have written more than two dozen books and they have a sufficient level of collective knowledge to keep the Op-Center series going for several more installments.

Whereas "Tom Clancy Presents Act of Valor," had a gestation period of only eight months from concept to publication, tailored to match the movie's release date, "Tom Clancy's Op-Center Out of the Ashes" had a more comfortable timeline for the authors. "From the first high concept conference call to publication was a year," Galdorisi, who still considers himself a part-time author, recounted. "It was a more relaxed pace, with more thorough, helpful and fruitful editing feedback from the final editors who helped shepherd the book along. Dick and I had one face-to-face meeting in Palm Springs in the early part of the book's genesis. We find E-mail and phone calls an effective way to work. I'm more left-brained, working with the story board, yellow post-its, treatment, narrative outline and the first cut of who writes what. Dick prefers to just write. He writes very well and very rapidly. It's a nice marriage and we have figured out who does what best."

How realistic is "Out of the Ashes," published by St. Martin's Press? Galdorisi said, "We envisioned (Op-Center's main character and retired four-star Admiral) Chase Williams together. Like most fictional characters he is a blend of people we have actually known. That's the other thing Dick and I stand on. We're not in the same category as Ian Fleming (creator of James Bond), but his plots were not probable, but possible. We try to discipline ourselves to not write something that we don't think can occur."

The writing pair is already deep into the second of their two contracted Op-Center novels. "We've turned in the second manuscript and our editor is reviewing it," Galdorisi said. "Then we go into the production process, copy editing and so on. Dick and I agree that the edits from Charlie Spicer are the best and most helpful edits we have ever gotten. Everything he gave us we thought, 'We can do that,' instead of, 'You're wrecking our game.' It was a pleasurable process. Dick and I enjoyed working on this together; we had fun doing this book. A total of 95,000 copies of the book were printed and 85,000 were shipped. The distribution is excellent."

One of the few in-person book signings to be held in conjunction with "Out of the Ashes" will occur at Bay Books, located at 1029 Orange Avenue in Coronado. The signing event will be held Thursday, June 12<sup>th</sup> at 5 pm.