



IN ORBIT WITH: DIEGO TOVAR

AN AUTHOR EXPLORING THEMES OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE.



About Diego Tovar

Diego Tovar is an environmentalist and author based in Washington, D.C. He holds degrees from Colorado State University and American University, and his work brings together environmental policy, justice, and storytelling. His writing has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Hill*, *Maryland Matters*, and other outlets. He is also a frequent guest lecturer on environmental storytelling, with talks at universities including NYU, Duke, Vanderbilt, Georgetown, and more. He is a 2026 award winner for the Bethesda, Maryland Short Essay Writing Contest. *Escape From Perihelion* is a 2026 'Readers Favorite' award winner.

Spotlight Piece: *Escape From Perihelion*

BOOK PLOT:

In 2999, Araya and Zaheen are building a life together in Nova Angeles, the second-class district beyond Los Angeles's gleaming elite dome. Then Araya is taken, forced into indentured servitude, and shipped to Perihelion, a brutal mining colony on Mars run by the corporation that powers their world.

As Araya struggles to survive the deadly conditions of Perihelion, Zaheen is left behind on Earth, where the forces that stole Araya begin closing in on her, too. Separated by two planets and unable to communicate, they are driven onto dangerous, diverging paths that will test how far they are willing to go for freedom and for each other.

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In Conversation with Diego Tovar

What first drew you to storytelling, and how did your journey begin?

“I was drawn to storytelling through my work in environmental policy. Early in my career, I saw that meaningful change doesn’t come from just data and policy. Those tools are essential, but they rarely move people on their own. What actually drives action is connection, whether it be listening to lived experiences, understanding communities, and feeling the weight of a story. That realization pushed me toward storytelling as a different kind of advocacy. I began writing fiction as a way to explore environmental issues on a human level. Since then, storytelling has become central to my work—both as a writer and as someone committed to environmental justice.”

How would you describe your work and the themes you keep returning to?

“I’d describe my work as cinematic, fast-paced, and grounded in environmental and political realities. I’m drawn to high-stakes stories that feel immersive and action-driven on the surface, but carry deeper connections to real-world issues underneath.

I tend to return to themes of environmental justice, power, and survival, especially how systems shape people, and how people either resist or become part of those systems. I want readers to feel like they’re inside the story, experiencing it moment by moment, while also walking away thinking more deeply about the world around them.

When someone says my writing feels like a movie, that’s one of the best compliments I can get. That’s exactly how I write. I’m visualizing every scene as it unfolds, and trying to translate that energy onto the page.”

How does the environment or climate shape your work?

“It’s central to everything I write. My work sits at the intersection of environmental justice, storytelling, and grassroots advocacy, so the climate crisis actively shapes the worlds, conflicts, and characters I create.

Through my work in environmental spaces, I’m constantly engaging with real communities, real struggles, and real efforts to create change. Those experiences often spark story ideas, influence character arcs, and ground my narratives in something tangible.

Writing, for me, is also a way of processing it all—the scale of the climate crisis, the complexity of the movement, and the humanity within it. It allows me to take what I’m seeing in the real world and translate it into stories that people can feel, not just understand.”

What does your creative process look like from idea to finished piece?

“I like to feel surprised by my own stories, as if I’m getting a glimpse into something unfolding in real time. I start with a loose idea, but I let the characters lead. I follow their decisions, their instincts, and the world around them, and I write as if I’m witnessing it alongside my main character.

Once I have a full draft, the real work begins. I go through multiple rounds of revisions, refining pacing, sharpening scenes, and making sure the emotional and thematic beats land the way they should. In terms of structure, I aim for consistency. I write about 750 words a day, four times a week, until I reach around 90,000 words for a completed novel. That rhythm helps me stay grounded while still giving the story room to evolve organically.”

What are you working on right now?

“Right now, I’m balancing two sides of the creative process—marketing my latest novel, *Escape From Perihelion*, and writing my next project.

The new book is still untitled, so I’m keeping details close for now, but I can say it leans into fast-paced, witty science fiction with a strong sense of mystery. It explores multiple distinct settings, each with its own atmosphere and stakes, and pushes further into the kind of immersive, cinematic storytelling I love to create. It’s a project that’s challenging me in new ways, which is always a good sign of a final product.”

Why do you think storytelling matters in shaping the future?

“Storytelling shapes how people understand the world, and more importantly, how they imagine what’s possible. When it comes to issues like climate change and environmental justice, the future can feel distant or abstract. Storytelling brings it closer. It allows people to see themselves in these worlds, to feel the stakes, and to understand the human impact behind the headlines.

I think storytelling also gives us the ability to challenge dominant narratives and reimagine systems that feel fixed. It creates space for new perspectives, especially from voices that haven’t always been centered. At its core, storytelling helps build futures we hope to imagine.”

What advice would you give to other emerging creatives?

“Create the work that feels honest to you, even if it doesn’t fit neatly into what you think it’s supposed to be. The stories that resonate most are the ones that come from a real sense of passion for the plot. Consistency matters more than bursts of inspiration. You don’t need to have everything figured out; you just need to keep showing up to the page, learning as you go, and finishing what you start.

Also, don’t underestimate the value of your perspective. The things you’ve experienced, the spaces you move through, the questions you’re asking are what make your work distinct. Finally, put your work out into the world. It’s easy to wait until something feels perfect, but growth comes from sharing, getting feedback, and being part of a creative community.”

If you could live in any fictional, sci-fi universe, where would you go and why?

“*Star Wars*. It’s one of the most immersive worlds ever created, and it blends action, politics, and deeply human storytelling in a way that really shapes how I think about my own work.

George Lucas is a huge creative influence for me. The way he built a galaxy that feels expansive and adventurous, while still exploring themes of power, resistance, and identity, is something I really connect with. There’s also something exciting about how vast that universe is. That sense of possibility and constant movement is exactly the kind of energy I try to bring into my own stories.”