



IN ORBIT WITH: MARCO GACINA



A SHORT STORY WRITER EXPLORING LIVED EXPERIENCE AND HIS ROOTS

About Marco Gacina

Marco Gacina works at NBC News in Washington DC. He hails from Los Angeles and earned his bachelor's degree in journalism from American University in 2025.

Marco wrote hundreds of NBA and WNBA columns for SB Nation before making the jump to political news at NBC. His goal is to someday move overseas to cover international affairs from a major city in Europe, such as London, Rome, or Kyiv, though doing so from DC sounds great, too. His short stories focus on themes of despair, indecision, and immaturity and are predominantly based on his own lived experiences and the experiences of those he is the closest to. Marco's main sources of inspiration are the writings of James Joyce; the music of Oasis, Blur, Green Day, and MF Doom; and his entire shelf of books about 20th century Eastern European history.

Spotlight Piece: *After the Siege*

"My main piece is based off of a real-world event: the siege of Vukovar, a three-month offensive by the federal Yugoslav army against the Croatian town of Vukovar. My father came of age in the SR Croatia during the civil war that tore Yugoslavia into several warring nations; this story is built around four boys sheltering in a basement who are roughly the same age as he and his three best friends were when they were doing the same.

My story centers on the despair of the unwilling participants in a war. The four boys are victims of an attempted ethnic cleansing and are being punished simply for existing in the wrong place and the wrong time (at least, as far as the federal Yugoslav army is concerned). Their livelihood has been entirely upended indefinitely, perhaps forever, and the non-linear process of coming to terms

with that uncertainty involves a cycle of hope disappearing and reappearing at random.

The story ends without a real resolution to the plot, though I would not consider it a cliffhanger. Rather, it ends in a transition, allowing the reader to fill in the remainder of the plot as they see fit.”

In Conversation with Marco Gacina

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

“I have always been a huge writer, and I’ve published hundreds of columns and articles about the NBA and WNBA, but it was not until earlier this year that I dipped my toes into writing fiction.

In April, my best friend took his own life, and I naturally started searching far and wide for an outlet. One day, I opened up a Google Doc to try and re-explore the night that my mom had called me to break the news, and that Google Doc evolved into *The Luxury of Denial*, which is an autobiographical perspective on suicide.

On a somewhat, though not entirely, lighter note, I am absolutely fascinated by late 20th century European history, particularly in the Eastern Bloc, and almost every book I read in my free time is about that topic. Given that my dad lived through it, I am especially fascinated by the breakup and subsequent civil war in Yugoslavia, so my first real crack at fiction came with *After the Siege* to try and combine my interest in history with my desire to write short fiction.”

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

“My work often focuses on well-meaning characters struggling, failing, or even dying, and I can say for certain that this comes as a result of my best friend’s suicide, which I mentioned before. I found that writing dark and morbid yet realistic fiction helped me to better understand myself and the world around me, as I’ve lived through a tragedy that will shape the rest of my life.

My two favorite pieces of short fiction of all time are James Joyce’s short stories *Eveline* and *Araby*, two stories that end abruptly just as the protagonists freeze in indecision (*Eveline*) or fail at the goal they’ve set out to achieve (*Araby*). I find that structuring short fiction around a pseudo-cliffhanger ending where the plot has reached its conclusion but the emotional fallout is left to the reader to digest on their own allows me the most space to explore the strange

and contradictory sensations that have been my life over the past few months. Perhaps as I write more and more, I'll drift away from that style before it becomes overly formulaic...

One thing I should add is that I often find myself more inspired by music than by other works of literature, which I think helps explain why I always choose to write such self-contained narratives. I find myself most inspired by Oasis; their gritty, down-to-earth (and sometimes a touch nonsensical) writing in songs like *Bring It On Down*, *Cigarettes and Alcohol*, *Live Forever*, and *Some Might Say* inspires the slight edge with which I choose to write. In their songs, Oasis strikes a unique balance where they always seem to still be with it, though it's totally conceivable that they might fall off the deep end at any given moment. That, to me, is some of the most inspired writing I've ever spent time with.

I also draw a lot of inspiration from Blur, though given that I just waxed on about Oasis, you might be able to correctly guess that I am in the midst of a 90s Britpop phase right now. I absolutely adore the Blur songs that serve as essentially character analyses — *Tracy Jacks*, *Country House*, *Charmless Man*, *Badhead*, just to name a few. It's sort of an unconventional way to write a song to spend four or so minutes building out a character profile of someone who is never to be heard from again, and I feel this run-and-gun style really influences my writing."

How does the environment or climate shape your work?

"Somewhat differently from the other writers here at Fast Orbit, I would say the environment influences my work in a much more social sense. Rather than being informed by the environment in an ecological sense, my stories center around the social and political environments within which characters exist. For example, the boys in *After the Siege* live in the Croatian town of Vukovar, which the Yugoslav federal army in real life laid waste to in 1991. The despair and resignation the characters feel in that story are informed by the almost post-apocalyptic version of their hometown."

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

"This varies widely from story to story. I self-published another story, *The Judge's Daughter*, which is not based on one specific person or event; rather, I consider it a stained-glass window of experiences in my own life and the lives of some of my friends. I set out to write a story about a young guy caught at a crossroads of desire, sort of the opposite of a coming-of-age story, and so I created an unnamed omniscient narrator based on five or six different people,

including myself. I am pretty happy with how I crafted a plausible narrative about a party and a breakup out of elements of dozens of parties and breakups that my best friends and I have experienced over the past seven or eight years.

Otherwise, I always start with a single idea that I allow to blossom naturally. For *After the Siege*, I knew I wanted to write a historical fiction piece about the civil war in Yugoslavia, and I knew I wanted the main characters to be based on young versions of my dad and his friends, who grew up during said Civil War. From there, I just started to write, and then I went back and revised, adding and subtracting character traits, narratives, dialogue, etc, until I was left with a final story I was happy with. Sometimes, brain dumping and then refining later is the best way to go for me.”

What are you working on right now?

“I’m working on a story critiquing the ruthless capitalism of professional sports. I started with an idea about an NBA player who dies of a drug overdose after suffering through a depressive spiral after failing publicly, and I am in the process of reverse-engineering a long character study type of piece centered around that.

I’m also working on a historical fiction piece about two Soviet soldiers stationed at a remote outpost deep in the valleys of Kyrgyzstan in the spring of 1992, well after the Soviet Union collapsed. I want to explore life on the fringes of an empire and how relatively little massive geopolitical events can materially affect those living under such conditions.”

Why do you think storytelling matters in shaping the future?

“Storytelling is a snapshot of the time at which something is written, and in my view, it helps to inform historians, sociologists, and especially everyday people of the future.”

What advice would you give to other emerging creatives?

“Don’t get hung up on the ideation process, as no idea is completely original. Every idea is based on something and comes from some source of inspiration, so when you’re getting started, really look inside yourself and consider some of the most interesting or unique things that have happened to you, and that is a great place to start.”

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

“I’m not sure it quite qualifies as sci-fi, but I would live in Hyrule from *The Legend of Zelda* series. I would absolutely love to live in Hyrule Castle Town from *Ocarina of Time* or Skyloft from *Skyward Sword* and explore the far reaches of one of the most creatively-designed universes out there.”