

Author Q&A

with

Marc Paoletti



It's not often that we encounter such astute writers in the increasingly overcrowded literary arts, and in a fiction writing industry ever more dominated by marketing driven hum-drum themes void of nuance. These are just some of the reasons we find it refreshing to delve into what makes Marc tick as an author.

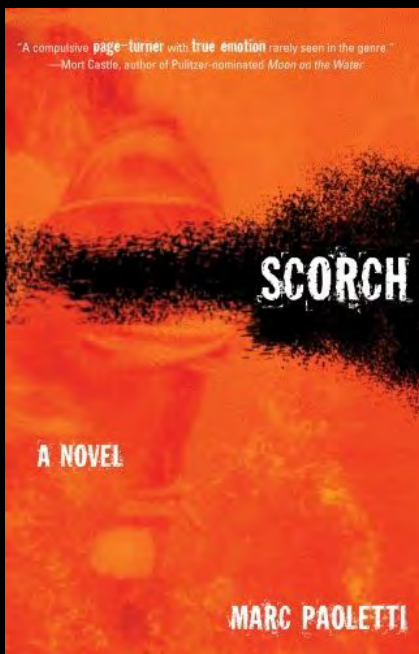
What brought you to the world of fiction writing?

A number of things, certainly, but I suppose the largest motivating factor was lack of resources. There was a point in Los Angeles when I was dirt poor and wondering what sort of hobby I'd like to try. You know, something to take my mind off the fact that I couldn't afford to do much. I

couldn't exactly ski or surf or do anything else that required expensive equipment, so I started to write. Cheapest habit going—pen and paper. Things progressed from there.

What is your typical writing day?

I work as a freelance advertising copywriter, so my writing day depends on my schedule. If I'm working at an agency, I'll write for 2-3 hours after work, but I won't go home to do it. If I go home, I'll be too tempted to do anything but write. I'll head to a coffee shop instead so it feels like I'm still at the office. If I'm between freelance jobs, I'll spend most of the day writing, which is a mixed blessing. Yes, it can be a productive time, but any gains I might



Marc's first thriller, *SCORCH* (Five Star).

make in a novel or story is counterbalanced by feelings of guilt that I didn't use that time to find another freelance assignment.

In addition to novels, you've written short stories that have been published in anthologies. Tell us what you enjoy most about short stories.

I love short stories because they allow you to explore a singular incident, or a narrowly focused period of time. Typically, in a novel, these types of incidents are glossed over somewhat for the good of novel — i.e., to keep the story moving — so it's nice to delve a little more deeply. For example, my story "Twenty Minutes" describes a young man's emotional state in the moments before making a phone call of forgiveness to his father. In "Apple," the entirety of the story takes place in the time it takes an assassin to stalk his prey down an airport concourse. Also, I'm a huge proponent of theme, and short stories give you the opportunity to present your theme in a more consistent manner than you might in a novel. The simple reason is length. When you're writing 90,000 words, there's a far greater chance you'll jump the rails for any number of reasons — an editor's suggestion, for example. In a

short story, you're better able to make sure that every character, action, setting, line of dialogue, etc. reflects your theme to deliver your message

Tell us about your current projects.

I'm in the process of finishing a crime novel. After that, I'll start work on a light mystery series and a literary coming-of-age tale. Some time after that, I'll write a road novel, a quirky love story, and maybe a young adult urban fantasy. Plenty of stuff planned. Additionally, I'm making several of my previously published short stories available on the Kindle and Nook. I'm packaging these stories in groups of three according to genre — mini-anthologies, if you will. Among others, I've posted a crime anthology entitled *BOUND BY BLOOD: 3 STORIES OF DARK CRIME*, a magical reality anthology entitled *WAKING UP: 3 STORIES THAT BLUR THE LINES OF REALITY*, and a literary anthology entitled *THE DAY THE RADIO DID MOST OF THE TALKING AND TWO OTHER STORIES*. I've also posted novellas that I've written myself — for example, one entitled *JORGE, EL RATÓN VOLADOR*, which is about the weird and wonderful world of Lucha Libre — and others that I've co-written. All are selling well. I find the rise of electronic publishing very exciting; it's given these stories a life beyond the printed page.

Do you identify with any of the characters in your stories?

Unconsciously or not, I tend to write about people who undergo traumatic physical and psychological transformations in the course of their narrative arcs. I'm not quite sure why that's the case. Something within my psyche must demand it, so I suppose I identify with many of my characters — heroes and villains both — even if I don't always know the reason. However, I do know these reasons are rarely literal. For example, I don't in any way identify with the actions perpetrated by the telemarketer in "No Eye

to Watch, Not Tongue to Wound," but I do identify with her desire to escape a deeply unsatisfying situation. I've never experienced dawning and absolute existential terror like the kid in "The Day the Radio Did Most of the Talking" or the young man in "We Belong Inside You," but I do identify with change that is lifelong and inescapable. My penchant for writing about physical change is equally curious. David Cole in *SCORCH* is burned, Scott Boulder in *THE LAST VAMPIRE* turns into a monster and then changes again in the sequel, the father in my short story "Depths" hallucinates so severely that his son becomes a reptile, and so on. It might have something to do with changes I'd like to make in my environment at any given time.

How did your experience in movies and television influence your writing?

I worked as a special effects pyrotechnician in film and television for four years and, before that, I held low-ladder positions like production assistant, etc. Honestly, I don't think my experiences in Hollywood had more or less affect than any other experience in my life. I've mined those movie biz experiences for story purposes, of course — *SCORCH* is a

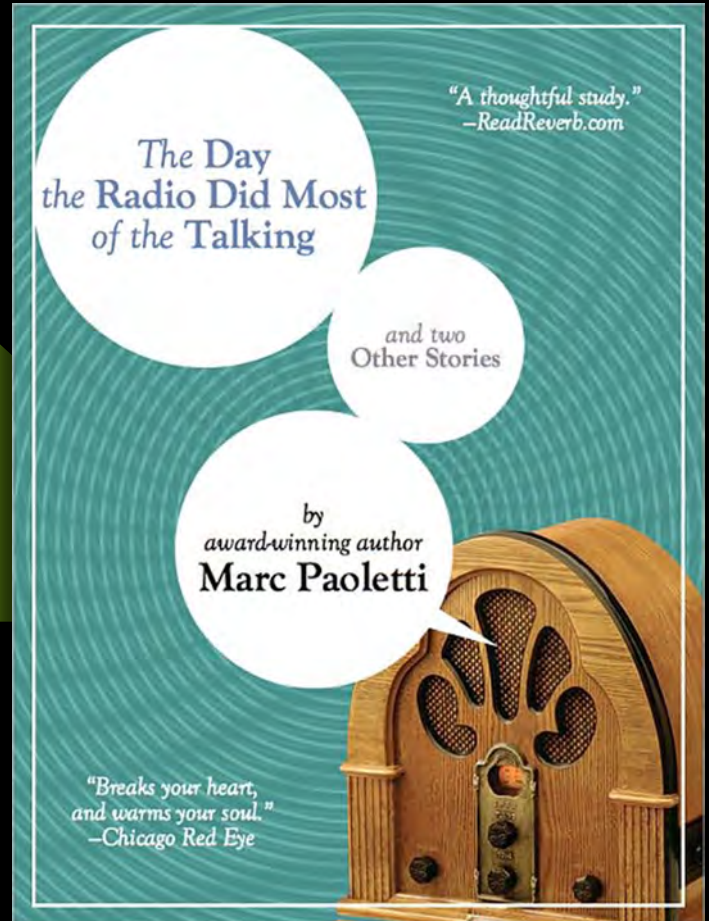
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prime example — but, since then, I've mined other experiences just as frequently. However, I will say this: the people I worked with in special effects were among the most noble I've met anywhere, and that quality — as it pertained to them — often makes its way into my protagonists.



Some of Marc's recent books: *THE VAMPIRE AGENT* (Del Ray) and a short stories collection.



What would you recommend to aspiring fiction writers?

Three quick things: 1) I believe that writing is about artistic and intellectual freedom, so I'd recommend that you write about what moves you. Want to spin a tale about politics? A failed relationship? Vampires? Midget kleptomaniacs, or some rare species of flower found above a certain elevation in the Himalayas? Go for it. I sold a story entitled "Waking Up" that follows a man as he attempts to uncover the cause of his nightmares—it's metafiction wrapped in literary analysis wrapped in a mystery. If I'd thought twice about the salability of that story, I probably never would have written it, but, at the time, I felt like it had to be done. Your passion about the subject matter will shine through and affect readers on an emotional level. 2) Rewriting is a key part of the writing process; don't let it freak you out. That story about how Kerouac wrote *ON THE ROAD* in a single draft is bullshit. Every writer must write multiple drafts to get to the good stuff. Think of it this way: How many times in life do you get do-overs? As a writer, you're able to improve on reality without anyone knowing the how or why of it. 3) If

you write with the exclusive purpose of getting published, it'll never happen. Getting published shouldn't be the goal; writing as honestly as you can should be. With the possible exception of love, sex, spiritual enlightenment, and Dutch apple pie, there's little better than writing something that says exactly what you'd hoped to say in exactly the way you'd hoped to say it.

How has living on the East and West coasts, and in the Midwest, changed you as an author?

To me, writing is all about sensibility, and living in diverse areas of the country has helped developed that sensibility. My first novel, *SCORCH*, takes place in Hollywood, and borrows heavily from my experiences of working as a special effects pyrotechnician in Hollywood for film and television. The crime novel that I'm

writing now takes place in a small, Midwestern steel town modeled after Gary, Indiana, and features a mill very much like US Steel. My ghost story "Veils" takes place at a burlesque theater in turn-of-the-century San Francisco—a city I adore. I've traveled out of the country, so a few of my stories have an international flavor. "Polenta," for example, is set at the end of the 19th century and deals with an Italian immigrant family.

Which are your favorite authors, and why?

I enjoy any author who can teach me something while entertaining me. I'm not picky about the lesson, but I believe that art—especially writing—should have a motivating thematic purpose behind it. If an author simply conveys a series of plot points, s/he might as well be writing advertising copy. ⊕