

Booklist

02/15/2005

STAR Alarcón, Daniel. *War by Candlelight*. Apr. 2005. 208p.
HarperCollins, \$23.95 (0-06-059478-0).

Born in Peru and raised in Birmingham, Alabama, Alarcón returned to Peru on a Fulbright and now evokes the sorrows and beauty of that ravaged land with a precision and steadiness that stand in inverse proportion to the magnitude of the losses he so powerfully dramatizes. Floods and earthquakes destroy what little equilibrium remains in a relentlessly violent world in which the authorities and the rebels are equally vicious and corrupt. In "Flood," a carnival of carnage erupts as floodwaters rise, and Alarcón's young narrator reports, "We were blind with happiness." In another tale, a young painter gives up his studies in Lima to join the revolution, but things get off to an ignoble start. In "City of Clowns," first published in the *New Yorker*, a reporter turns a casual assignment into a metaphysical experience. Keenly aware of how "life can disappear just like that," and cued to the fact that even as technology seems to erase barriers between cultures, it fails to foster genuine communication, Alarcón, gifted and perceptive, joins a new wave of incisive literary border-crossers that includes David Bezmozgis, Courtney Angela Brkic, Judy Budnitz, and Rattawut Lapcharoensap. —

Donna Seaman

YA/M: *Teens will respond to the immediate stories of young adults who face tyranny, violence, natural disasters, and heartache.* DS.