

BOOKS CELEBRATING WORDS

'WAR' OF WORDS

Peruvian author Daniel Alarcón delivers a stunning fiction debut

BY ELBERT GARCIA

DESPITE the stacks of rejection letters documenting his struggles over the years, Daniel Alarcón isn't ashamed to call himself

lucky. Touted by some as the next voice of his generation, the Peruvian born, Alabarna-raised author knows that his initial buzz is the result of timing, as well as talent.

"It's [about] getting the right stories in front of the right people," says Alarcón, whose highly anticipated story collection, "War By Candlelight," debuts on bookshelves this month.

The 28-year-old first burst on the literary scene in 2003 when his short story "City of Clowns" graced the pages of the New Yorker's New Fiction section.

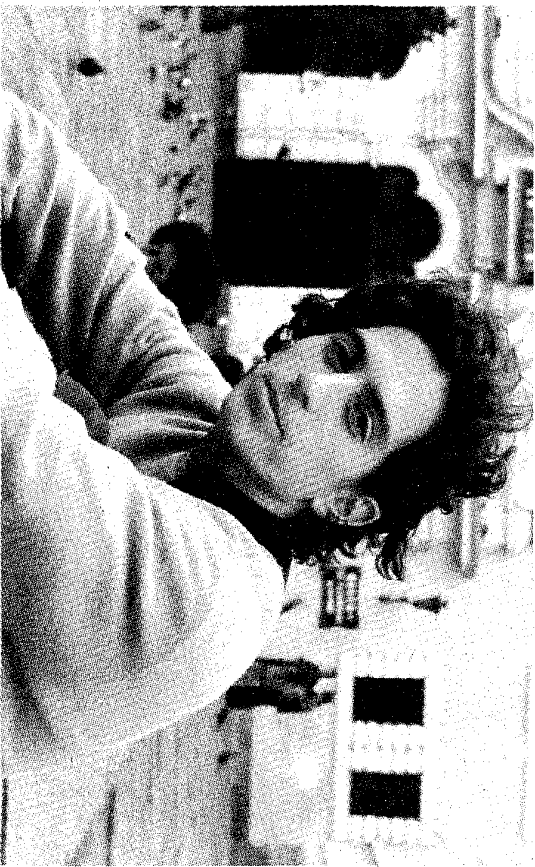
Two years earlier, he had been absorbed in the carnival that is Lima, Peru on a Fulbright Scholarship.

There, his research brought him face-to-face with a city transformed as much by the children of indigent workers from the Andean countryside as by the economic and political fissures ushered in by globalization.

That year, as well as his childhood in Birmingham, Alabama, and his time teaching public school-children in The Bronx and Harlem, gave him plenty of material to reflect on when he arrived at the prestigious Iowa Writer's Workshop.

"My interests were not purely literary [but] anthropological, historical, political," says Alarcón of his time at the graduate writing program. "I was trying to describe something that I saw — a reality that was overwhelming."

The collection consists of nine stories set across past and present Lima and New York. Closest to the young author's heart by far is the title story, a tale loosely



Daniel Alarcón, 28, is the author of the short story collection "War by Candlelight."

based around a relative's involvement with the radical left and the effect that insurgency groups had on the country. Political turmoil, street

violence and natural disasters challenge everyone in the book. Yet the title also refers to personal battles — the fight to find one's identity in another country, the

fight to be recognized by a lover's family, the fight to live after a soulmate's death.

What results are stories that can take on wonderful new meanings in the imagination of any reader. "It's co-creation," says Alarcón. "Yes, the author writes the story. But then the readers put shades of their own lives into it."

■ **April 27, 7:30 p.m.**
Barres & Noble, 2289 Broadway at 82nd Street (212) 362-8835.

■ **April 29, 7 p.m.**
Housing Works, 126 Crosby St., between Houston and Prince streets. (212) 334-3324.

■ **May 1, 7 p.m.**
KGB Bar, 85 East Fourth Street, between Second and Third avenues. (212) 505-3360.

READINGS

Presented by the Peruvian Cultural Center
with the support of the Peruvian Consulate in New York City

DANIEL ALARCÓN
WAR
by
candlelight