Storyteller’s Latest Is His “Exile on Macon Street”
Like Iconic Rolling Stones Album, New Book is Alvarez’s Best Work

To the list of classic literary characters—in the tradition of Eugene Gant and Augie March—add the name Basilio Boullosa, the sign painter who pumps lifeblood through Rafael Alvarez’s new fiction collection, *Basilio Boullosa Stars in the Fountain of Highlandtown*.

Alvarez returns to East Baltimore’s “Holy Land” first charted in his debut twenty years ago. In a mix of stories about a junk man and his Greek lover, duck blood soup, flying John Lennon dolls, and a hot-air balloon shaped like the head of Elvis Presley, Alvarez created his alter-ego Basilio, an artist who brings canvases to life at night while painting the side of seafood trucks by day to make ends meet.

This new collection paints a fuller picture of “The Cartographer of Baltimore” from the age of six to his distant death on the other side of 80, still painting, still dreaming, still figuring out what the Catholic priest Pacifique Roy meant when he said, “Love is the measure by which we will be judged.”

“Past and present converge in an eternal now for both writer and character, a now flavored with the ache of abandonment,” writes Guggenheim Fellow Deborah Rudacille in the book’s foreword. “Alvarez’s characters are a particular kind of American—those restless souls who leave because they cannot stay but who refuse to surrender the sight, smell, taste, and touch of that which has been lost. They live in a permanent state of exile, a liminal world of the present shot through with the past, how enchanting the ache.”

A lifelong Baltimorean, Rafael Alvarez is the son of a tugboat engineer and a dedicated homemaker to whom the new book is dedicated. Educated in local Catholic schools, he graduated with a degree in English from Loyola University of Maryland. For twenty years, he worked as a City Desk reporter for the *Baltimore Sun*, specializing in the folklore of city neighborhoods upon which his fiction is based. Alvarez quit the paper in 2001 to work as a laborer on cable ships and soon after began writing for HBO’s police drama, *The Wire*. Since 2009, Alvarez has concentrated on writing books and screenplays for independent films.

Published in 1997, *The Fountain of Highlandtown* heralded the emergence of a reporter who wanted to tell stories that carried no expiration date. Alvarez’s new book—his eleventh overall—cements a reputation that will never expire.

“Stories from the treasure chest of one of America’s most talented scribes…”
— James McBride

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